COPPERNOB BUCKLAND

LAWRENCE R. BOURNE

NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR
Church of Scotland
Greenside
SUNDAY SCHOOL
Awarded to
for
Session 1929-30.

SENT THE MAN SPINNING TOWARDS THE EDGE OF THE JETTY

(*See page 178.*)

Coppernob Buckland

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

COPPERNOB CLOSES HIS BOOKS

THE afternoon sun poured down upon the grey buildings of Malmeswick town with the full force of an early summer heat-wave. Malmeswick School, on the crest of the hill leading northward from the town, stood partly in light, partly in shade. South and west towards the playing-fields, its old Bath stone glared white ; but on the east side, facing the main road, a double row of elms, tenanted by a noisy colony of rooks, cast a shadow that looked cool—one might almost say chilly—by comparison.

And the outward picture of the school at that moment might be taken as symbolical of the human life that eddied in and around it. Up from the playing-fields and the swimming-pool, knots of boys made their way towards the sunlit south door—chattering, laughing, apparently without a care amongst them. And in the Head's study, which looked out over the heavy grey portico, were four people, all of them uncomfortable, strained and gloomy.

The Head sat in a swivel chair in front of a big leather-covered table, and described segments of circles on the blotting pad with the tip of a paper-knife.

"So, Buckland, you persist in your denial?" he said, breaking a silence which was becoming oppressive.

The boy at the other side of the table was tall and slight, with bronze-red hair, a freckled, sunburnt face,

and blue eyes that seemed alternately to flash with eagerness and then mist over in bewilderment.

"Yes, sir; it's all a mistake. I was not in your garden on Tuesday night."

The paper-knife ceased to describe segments of circles, and became stationary, like a compass needle, pointing in the direction of the boy.

"It's not a mistake," said the Head. "Blunt identifies you"; and he turned to an elderly man—a gardener to judge by his appearance—who stood diffidently in the middle of the floor, and looked as though he would rather have been standing anywhere else. But there was no sign of hesitation in his answer.

"Yes, sir; I'll swear to it honest in any court of law."

"That'll do, Blunt; you can go." The Head made a gesture of dismissal, which the man promptly obeyed, relieved to be quit of the uncongenial atmosphere of the study. "I'd never 'a' thought it o' Mister Buckland," he muttered as he went; "but there, them red-headed chaps will break out."

The Head addressed the remaining member of the quartet. "Mr. Wilson, what are we to do in this matter?"

Mr. Wilson, known throughout the school as "Old Bill," was Buckland's House-master.

"Really, sir, I find it difficult to say. Of course, Buckland has not been altogether guiltless in the past of breaking school rules—out of bounds, and so forth; but nothing of the sort has come to my knowledge recently, and I should certainly not have suspected him of this."

"But the evidence, Wilson—the evidence! Here are Buckland's shoes stained with the prepared soil from my special beds; and Blunt identifies him."

"I know, I know," said Mr. Wilson. "Still, I should have expected Buckland to admit it if he was the culprit."

"But I'm not, sir," broke in the boy. "I was not there."

"That's enough," said the Head. When, later on, he came to review the matter in a calmer light, he had to admit that it was not enough, but at the moment he was angry. Moreover, he had taken a line and found it difficult to retreat from it. And then, the evidence! He emphasised his words with taps on the blotting pad from the paper-knife. "Your denials only make matters worse. To have ruined my strawberry beds is bad enough, but that might have been met—atoned for—by some adequate punishment. But since you refuse to admit it, I must resort to more extreme measures. I have no option. The honour of the school . . ."

The Head paused; Old Bill shifted uneasily; and Buckland's eyes seemed to be fixed intently on the paper-knife.

The Head went on. "I shall not expel you immediately, but request your father to take you away at the end of the term. Further, I shall decline to sign the necessary certificate of character to enable you to claim the Ellis Scholarship, which will consequently go to Bassett. You can go."

There was no appeal. The boy knew the Head—pig-headed old blighter! Now that his mind was made up, nothing that he—Buckland—could say would shift him. And what more could he say than he had already said?—and that only made matters worse. So he had been told. He had been committed on purely circumstantial evidence. It was beastly unjust but . . .

He braced himself up and walked firmly from the room.

Passing through the winding corridors of the old building, he came at length to the new wing, which was Wilson's House. He entered the study and took a look round. Corton, his study-mate, was not there.

Then the fortitude which had stood by him hitherto gave way, and, dropping into a chair, he buried his face in his arms over the table.

A few minutes later the door opened and Corton came in.

"Hullo, Coppernob, what's up?" he asked.

"Nothing—at least, everything's up. I'm sacked." Buckland spoke at random. Corton was a late comer to Malmeswick, and though he and Buckland had shared a study for a couple of terms they had not become pally. There was no particular ground of hostility, or even dislike, between them, but simply a mutual indifference. Corton was reserved and inclined to adopt a superior air. The wandering life he had led before coming to Malmeswick enabled him to pose as a man of the world; and events that moved the rest of the school profoundly left him cold and a trifle supercilious.

"Sacked! What for?" he asked.

"For mucking up the Head's strawberry beds—at least, I'm supposed to have done it."

"And didn't you?"

"Didn't I! Of course I didn't."

"Well, why didn't you tell 'em so?"

"Oh, dry up! Tell 'em so! I told 'em till I was blue in the face, but it wasn't any good. The Head's got hold of what he calls evidence that I did it, and nothing will make him believe I didn't."

"That's what comes of having a bad character. But it seems silly to me. If you didn't do it, somebody else did, and it ought not to be difficult to find out who it was."

"Well, you'd better go and find out, then," said Buckland irritably.

For a moment there was a strained silence; then:

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Corton.

Goaded to fury, Buckland sprang up, but the hot rejoinder that rose to his lips was checked by a tap at the door and the appearance of Mr. Wilson on the threshold.

"May I come in?" asked Old Bill. What he saw told him that things were not going happily in the study, but he forbore making any remark. Corton, with more delicacy than Buckland would have given him credit for, diplomatically withdrew.

"I've an unpleasant duty to discharge," began Mr. Wilson; "but it will not come as a surprise to you after what has just happened. You will understand there is no personal feeling in what I say."

Buckland gave him a queer smile. "Go on, sir," he said; "I can stick it."

"Very well. From to-day you are no longer a House prefect. I'm appointing Harvey in your place—for the time being, at any rate."

"Harvey's a good man," said Buckland. "I wish him luck. But what do you mean, sir, by 'for the time being'?"

"It's eight weeks to the end of term," replied Mr. Wilson. "You've that time in which to clear yourself."

Buckland nerved himself for an effort. "Please tell me straight out, sir," he said, "do you think I'm guilty and a liar?"

Mr. Wilson was taken aback, but recovered himself.

"Well, Buckland, the evidence against you seems pretty conclusive. You cannot explain it away; neither can you blame anyone for thinking you guilty. It would not be the first time you had been in the Headmaster's garden unbidden. I admit that I am entirely baffled; but I also admit gladly that I have never known you tell a deliberate falsehood. I would be the last to accuse you of such a thing; and yet . . . Buckland, I'm sorry—deeply sorry, and you can

count on me to help you in any way in my power."

Mr. Wilson went out, closing the door gently behind him, and the boy dropped again into his chair. It was the last straw. Old Bill was known throughout the school as a " square " man. Everyone respected him, and his good opinion counted for much. And Buckland felt that Mr. Wilson doubted him.

Presently a bell rang. He roused himself and walked unsteadily along the corridor. At the head of the stone staircase he ran into Mr. Wilson.

" You can return to your study, Buckland, if you like," he said. " I will excuse you from call-over this evening."

" Thank you, sir." Buckland turned back; then hesitated a moment, listening to the clatter of footsteps and the cheerful buzz of conversation. Strange how remote the normal life of the school seemed. A gulf had suddenly opened up between it and him, and he was cut off.

He went back to the study. He was more collected now that the first shock was passing, and he began to calculate the possible effects of the disaster. In a way he could sympathise with the Head. After sweating for eighteen months to produce the Big Strawberry that should eclipse all others at the County Show, to find his beds not merely despoiled of their fruit but ruined, was enough to try the temper of an enthusiastic horticulturist. Still, that didn't excuse him altogether.

Who had done it ? Buckland puzzled his brains, but could think of nobody. He had no particular enemies in the school so far as he knew; none who would have gone to work with the deliberate object of fixing the blame on him. Yet his stained shoes could not be accounted for on any other ground. He did not hit it with Corton, but Corton would have regarded such a proceeding as exceedingly childish. In addition to which, he could have had no possible motive.

So long as Old Bill had believed him innocent he had hoped that the real culprit would be brought to light ; but now apparently everyone was satisfied that he was the guilty party, and there was no need to probe the matter further.

His thought reverted to home : what would they think there ? His mother would, of course, believe him ; so would Sis. The guv'nor—well, he would say, " Of course I must accept your statement, Walter, but it is most unfortunate. Your prospects are completely ruined." Or words to that effect.

Those dreams of the University, upon which his father was so set, must now be put away. Everything depended on his winning the Ellis Scholarship, and he had won it ; but success in the examination alone was not sufficient. One of the conditions attached to it was that the winner must be certified worthy of it. He must be a Credit to the School. That qualification, however, was to be denied him, and the scholarship would go to Bassett, who had run him close.

It had been arranged that if he failed in the scholarship he should follow his father into the National and Imperial Bank—dismal prospect!—but with such a record as his it was doubtful if he would be accepted as a candidate for a clerkship.

" Hang it! " he exclaimed at length ; " I won't go home like a whipped puppy with my tail between my legs. I'll make my own way in the world. Others have done it : I can do it."

This idea, once it had taken root in his mind, developed with great rapidity. By bed-time it had become a practical scheme offering a fair chance of success, and, not to allow his resolution time to cool, he determined to put it to the test of immediate action.

That night, when the moon shone down on the silent mass of the school buildings, making it a study not so much in light and shade as in black and white, and the

distant town clock chimed two, a figure slipped along in the shadow of the elms, ran across the open to the boundary wall, paused there long enough to take a last look back, then scrambled over, and set forth on the road north.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

A DOUBLE DISAPPEARANCE

STEEPLEBOROUGH is a market town and a railway junction of considerable importance in the south of England. It is the recognised "first stop" from London, and the down line serves many branches that carry holiday makers to pleasant seaside resorts. Due south it is a short run to Southampton, and the line north is a quick route to Birmingham or Bristol.

The inhabitants are proud of their railway station, their Early English Abbey Church—"the finest specimen in the country," as the local guide-book says—and their market—"the most important in the south and west of England."

Mr. Buckland, manager of the Steepleborough branch of the National and Imperial Bank, had reason to bless the good train service when, at 9.30 on Friday morning, he received a wire at the boarding-house at Bournemouth, where he had just installed his wife and daughter for a few days' holiday, from one of his clerks.

Please return—Hutch absent—key missing.

He lost not a moment in obeying the summons, for he realised its significance. In the absence of the cashier and the key of the strong room, business would be at a standstill; and if the circumstances became

known—as it must sooner or later—a run on the bank might result.

A taxi rushed him to Bournemouth station in time to catch the ten o'clock express, and thirty-five minutes later he reached Steepleborough. Henderson, senior ledger clerk, stood on the bank steps awaiting him.

"Hasn't Mr. Hutch come yet?" asked Mr. Buckland.

"No, sir. I sent over to his lodgings, and Mrs. Stewer says he went up to town on the 6.15 last evening. He said he would be away the night, but would be back here on the 8.45 this morning—the 7.5 from Waterloo, sir."

Mr. Buckland had a duplicate key with which he opened the safe, and the clerks prepared to carry on.

"Where are the pound notes from yesterday's paying in?" asked the manager.

"Mr. Hutch closed the safe as usual, sir, and took the strong-room key," replied Henderson. "I noticed Martin hand him the cash."

"Of course Martin kept the key of the safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Martin," said Mr. Buckland with rising anxiety, "give me the safe figures at once."

The clerk read out a short list, and Mr. Buckland promptly announced. "The pound notes are missing—one thousand and thirty-seven. Ring up the police station, and ask Superintendent Friend to come here immediately." He turned the key in the strong-room door, and followed the clerk to the telephone.

"The Superintendent will be round in about ten minutes, sir."

"Good. Now a trunk call—head office—Mr. Engleton or Mr. Carr. Switch through to my room."

Mr. Buckland sat down in his big office chair, stretched his legs straight out in front of him, and mopped his forehead with a pocket handkerchief.

Then the telephone bell tinkled, and to Mr. Engleton, general manager and a director of the bank, he told what had happened. In reply, he was informed that Mr. Engleton would come down to Steepleborough later on in the day, and that, in the meantime, Scotland Yard would be informed of the affair and asked to assist the local police.

A little later Superintendent Friend arrived, and he and Mr. Buckland together went into things; they checked over a mass of detail connected with the strong-room, made a general examination of the premises, asked a few questions of members of the staff; then decided to confer again on the arrival of the officer from London.

"It's a curious robbery," remarked the Superintendent. "I wonder what was in that zinc case you say is missing?"

"That we can't know till Sir Henry Bempton explains," answered Mr. Buckland. "I hope he'll get here this afternoon. That might happen to be just the clue we require."

"Quite so; but, meanwhile, I want to get a line on Hutch."

Three o'clock found a conclave assembled in the manager's room: Mr. Engleton, a cool, sharp-featured business man; Mr. Pullman, a Detective-Inspector from Scotland Yard; the local Superintendent, and Mr. Buckland.

Mr. Engleton quickly got to the matter in hand. "Now, Buckland, let us have your story right through."

The manager outlined the facts already known, to which Superintendent Friend added the results of his own inquiries. "The cashier, Hutch, left his lodgings just before six last evening. He stated that he was going to London to attend a meeting in connection with a golf championship. His landlady says he took

no luggage as far as she is aware except his bag of golf clubs. I obtained a search-warrant and entered his rooms, and I've formed the opinion that he had already got some of his personal effects away. For instance, he went out wearing a sports coat and flannels, yet the blue suit which he usually wore is missing."

"What sort of a man did you find Hutch?" asked the detective, addressing Mr. Buckland.

"To tell the truth, I don't know much about him. As Mr. Engleton has informed you, he was transferred to this branch from Fishbourne only about six months ago. He said very little to me, but I got the impression that he was disappointed at not being appointed manager at Fishbourne when Mr. Young died."

"Quite possible," broke in Mr. Engleton; "quite possible. In fact, we sent him here, which was a step up, because we felt Shalfleet and he might not hit it."

"He's a big golfing man, is he?" queried the detective.

"Certainly he seems to have got very keen lately," replied Mr. Buckland. "Since about the end of March he's been making a hobby of visiting south-coast courses every week-end—Bournemouth one week, Poole another. He's even been as far west as the Warren at Dawlish."

The detective rubbed his chin; then, turning to Mr. Engleton, asked, "Can you say if he did much in that way when he was at Fishbourne?"

"No, I can't answer that. In fact, I've some hazy idea I heard poor old Young say he was keen on fishing."

Presently Sir Henry Bempton was announced. The baronet was obviously ill at ease, and, as soon as the brief introductions were over, broke out: "If that zinc cylinder of mine is missing it's a great misfortune. I wouldn't have lost it for thousands."

"What was inside?" asked the Scotland Yard officer, coming to the point at once.

"Well, I hardly like to tell you. If you consider it necessary, of course, I must, but it is for your ears only."

"I'm not sure that we can pledge that," replied Mr. Engleton, shaking his head.

"I'm afraid you'll have to," said Sir Henry. "If you don't, I shall be obliged to ask the Foreign Office to bring pressure to bear."

"Oh, oh! Secret service goods, eh?" ejaculated the detective.

"No; hardly that; but in view of my leaving England shortly to take up a diplomatic appointment in Italy, something equally important."

"The point is this," said Mr. Engleton: "were the contents such that our man might be tempted to take them?"

"Yes, if he knew what the contents were. And, by Jove! that reminds me," Sir Henry went on with rising excitement. "Some weeks ago, early in March —the day you were at your London office, Mr. Buckland——"

"March fifth or sixth."

"Well, on one of those days Hutch asked me if I'd mind resealing the case, as he had noticed the seal was damaged. He said he thought it had knocked against the deed boxes I have stored in the strong-room."

"I'm afraid we must ask you to name the contents," said the detective after a pause; "and if we have to make the matter public we'll give you fair warning."

To this Sir Henry agreed. "Well," he said, "the cylinder contained two Italian old masters. The canvases had been removed from their stretchers and smuggled out of Italy—in fact, they were probably stolen during the war, about the time the Austrians made their big push."

Neither Mr. Engleton nor Mr. Buckland saw anything very significant in this disclosure. The detective, however, raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips in a whistle, though he made no sound. The movement was not lost upon Sir Henry, who, for all that he was well practised in the art of self-control and seldom allowed his face to betray his feelings, for once in his life blushed.

"I'm keen on pictures, as you know," he resumed, "and these were offered me during my Mediterranean cruise last autumn. We put in at a little place, Portofino, a favourite haunt of artists, and during the evening a man came off in a boat to our yacht. He told me a rambling story of having been valet to some count who had a wonderful private collection at his place near Spresiano. He said that when the Austrians came over, his master told him to help himself to any valuables rather than leave them to be looted. Most things had already been moved, but these two panel pictures were left. He cut them carefully out of their frames, and took them away, with a few other trifles. He said he was afraid to sell them to his own countrymen for fear he should be accused of theft; and the only offer he had received for them so far was from a Frenchman conditional on his delivering them on French soil. He had been as far as the frontier, then decided that it was too risky to cross. To cut a long story short, I gave him a draft for £500."

"I wonder if he was a rogue and swindled you out of the five hundred," commented Mr. Engleton.

"That side of the question, of course, is my affair," replied Sir Henry. "They are two genuine Giovanni Bellinis, early sixteenth-century work, and superb examples of the Venetian School. They are mythological subjects, and all the more rare on that account, as Giovanni was a church painter."

"If Hutch is carting those round he ought to be easy enough to get hold of," suggested Mr. Engleton, and the Superintendent nodded. "What do you say, Mr. Pullman?'

"It's dashed awkward," replied the Inspector. "I see Sir Henry's point well enough. The attitude of the Italian Government against art treasures being smuggled out of the country makes it important that we should keep his name out of it if possible. I had to do with a case of the sort not long ago. Why, sir," he continued, turning directly to Sir Henry, "do you know that if a man in your position were suspected of such a thing it would lead to international complications—another war, pretty near?"

"Not quite so bad as that," said Sir Henry, "but still bad enough—too serious for us to run unnecessary risks."

"You're getting out of my depth, gentlemen," exclaimed the Superintendent. "How about Hutch?"

"He's heading for Italy, or, at any rate, somewhere near the Italian frontier," said Mr. Pullman decidedly. "He'll negotiate for a big reward, and indemnity, or safe harbourage, one might put it, against extradition. I daresay he crossed last night."

"Not from Southampton," said the Superintendent. "I had both the Havre and St. Malo sailings examined."

"Well, if he went up to London he has had ample time to cross from either Dover or Newhaven. We must see what Paris can do for us."

"You've got a stiff proposition before you, gentlemen," said Mr. Engleton after some further discussion. "When you consider our system of dividing the keys between the various senior members of the staff, you must realise that Hutch was taking a huge risk of being observed pocketing the packages of notes. It must have been little short of a conjuring trick. He

is evidently clever, and may show it in the plans he makes to get away."

"If he could get into the States with those pictures," broke in Sir Henry, "he could sell them for a hundred thousand dollars."

"I don't think he'll try," replied the detective. "Of course we'll have every foreign-bound passenger ship checked over, but I warrant he'd find the U.S.A. Customs too much for him. Besides, he'd have no security there, whereas he can make terms with the Italians and be safe. He's in France for a thousand."

"Or Switzerland," suggested Mr. Buckland; "that's a happy hunting ground for defaulters like him."

"That's not so likely: it means crossing a second frontier."

The police officers proceeded to make some further inspection of the bank premises, and while they were so engaged a telegraph messenger arrived.

"I took this to your house, sir," said the boy to Mr. Buckland, "and was told to bring it on here."

The manager tore open the orange envelope, and read the message; then, with a hand that trembled, he passed the telegram to Mr. Engleton.

"My boy," he said—"run away from school—in disgrace."

The director's face was a study in varying expressions. First a hard light came into his eyes, then he seemed puzzled; and finally the sight of Mr. Buckland's distress moved him to sympathy.

"I'm sorry, Buckland," he said. "I wonder what it means?"

The detective, on hearing the news, half hinted at a possible connection between young Buckland's disappearance and the robbery, but both Sir Henry and the Superintendent ridiculed the idea.

"Get through on the 'phone and ask for more

details," advised Mr. Engleton. "I wonder the Headmaster didn't 'phone you instead of sending this wire."

"It's a characteristic message," observed Sir Henry. "I know Earle, and, by the way, he hates telephones." Then, looking over the telegram again, he added, "Spiteful old beggar, too, when he's roused. 'Disappeared during the night . . . no trace in the neighbourhood . . . unable to receive him again at school.'"

"Distinctly churlish," said Mr. Engleton. "A few words of regret, and the latter part, if he had to say it at all, sent by letter, would have been better."

The telephone conversation between Mr. Buckland and the Headmaster did not add much to the information contained in the telegram, and it did nothing towards relieving the manager's anxiety. His son must have left the school during the night, and had not been seen since, either there or in the town; nor did he appear to have attempted to take the train either at Malmeswick or Bastoke, the junction with the main line fifteen miles away.

Meanwhile, the detective had been examining a map and a timetable. "I don't think it has anything to do with our job," he remarked. "If Hutch has made for the Continent, as I imagine, your son couldn't have joined him unless he had a motor waiting to run him up to London."

"It's a preposterous idea," cried Mr. Buckland. "My son has never met Hutch. He has never been down to the bank since he came, and the only time Hutch was ever at my house Walter was at school."

"Well, it's an extraordinary coincidence, at any rate," said the detective, and let the matter drop, though not without some reluctance, for, from his point of view, it seemed to promise a rather interesting complication to the affair.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE BEGINNING OF THE LONG TRAIL

AT the cross-roads beyond the school Walter Buckland turned to the westward. A slight dip in the road was followed by a rise, and from the open hill-top he got his last view of the school, which reposed grey and ghostly in the silvery moonlight. Thus far he had walked hurriedly, and the large haversack, which contained what few things he could bring away with him, needed to be adjusted for comfort.

It was a small outfit for anyone starting off to make his way unaided in the world—though there are classic instances of successful careers being founded on less. His pocket also was light, though not so light as one might have expected it to be in mid-term, for he had the greater part of two guineas which had been sent to him by an aunt in Falmouth to celebrate his winning the scholarship. This, with a spare pound he had kept for several terms, and fourteen and fourpence-halfpenny, constituted his capital.

He arranged his pack, took a careful look at a road-map, dimly visible in the moonlight, then resolutely turned his back on the old school and went on his way.

He decided to follow by-ways at first instead of the main roads, and this hampered his progress since he could not be sure of his direction, and the sign-posts, when they occurred, were not easily read in the semi-darkness. Nevertheless, daybreak found him eight good miles on his way; and, joining a main road bearing a direction to Bristol, he walked steadily on, until presently he met early-risers stirring in the little hamlets through which he passed, and noticed wisps of smoke arising from cottage chimneys.

He began to feel hungry and had a craving for coffee, but he hesitated to ask any cottager to provide a meal, at any rate until he had put a greater distance between himself and the school.

"They may talk," he said to himself; "probably tell a yarn to the village policeman, and lead to my being identified."

A little later on, however, he came to a decent-sized village, where the door of a little refreshment shop stood open. He decided to risk it.

"Yes, sure, sir; no trouble. You can have tea or coffee; boil you a couple of eggs, and us have plenty of bread and butter on hand."

Walter accepted the offer gratefully, but inwardly hoped he would not be charged too tall a figure. The shopkeeper seemed to divine his thought, for he added, "One and threepence, including as much bread and butter as you've a mind to. Early morning walkin' do make folk hungry."

He had finished one egg and was in the middle of his third cup of tea when he heard a heavy motor draw up outside. On the instant panic seized him, and he looked around for a way by which to bolt; but noticing that it was nothing more terrifying than a motor lorry that had stopped in front of the shop door, he decided that his alarm was due to the state of his nerves, and that he must keep a tighter grip on himself.

The driver of the lorry got down from his seat and entered the shop, travel-stained and greasy. He gave a grunt of satisfaction as he sat down heavily in a chair, and bestowed a cheerful word of greeting all round.

"Good morning, sir. Hullo, Ma! Eggs and bacon, and a strong pot o' tea."

"Hullo, Mr. James; it's you, is it. You're travelling early."

"Huh—early! Blinking late, I call it. Been out all night. Broke a valve-spring—took me an hour to get it down. Then I dropped the bally cotter-pin. I searched a couple of hours for it, and was just going off for help when I spotted it right in the middle of a clump of dandelions. It must have hit a stone and jumped."

"Ay, you do have some trouble with them motors, sure enough. Where was you?"

"Matter o' four mile out o' Ciren. I should have stayed there the night by rights, but I fancied to push on a bit—got to be down to Avonmouth by one o'clock."

He went out to wash his hands, but before Walter had finished his meal he was back again, and remarked:

"You're out middling early. On a walking tour, eh?"

"Well—er—yes, something of the sort," replied Walter.

The driver glanced at Walter's boots. "I reckon you've been out all night, what?"

"Yes," admitted the boy; "I have. I—well, you see, it's rather special. I want to get well on my way to Bristol."

"Bristol, do you? Come along with me, then. I'm going right through."

Walter hesitated, but it was too good a chance to be let slip without adequate reason, so he accepted the offer and thanked the man warmly.

"That's all right. Bit of company on the road is pleasant, but we've got to be careful in some places. An interferin' copper might make trouble about my carrying passengers."

"Oh, I say, I won't come if there's any chance of your getting into trouble," exclaimed Walter, by no means anxious to get mixed up in any argument with the police.

"No fear of that," replied the driver lightly. "I'll drop you off before we get to the middle of the town."

Breakfast finished, they lost no time in making a start. The driving seat of the lorry was shut right in by glass screens, which gave one the impression of being in the wheelhouse of a small steamer. The noise of the motor, and the general rattle as the heavy vehicle bumped along at a good fifteen miles an hour, made conversation difficult. Walter was not sorry, since he had no wish to be questioned respecting the "something special" which was the object of his journey. He tried to take an intelligent interest in the motor, and found the driver an enthusiast, ready to talk to any length about the merits of the "old gel."

"She's the Rolls-Royce of the lorry trade," he said. "I can get twenty-five out of her easy; but it don't do her no good, and shakes her load up too much on these 'ere roads. Fifteen to eighteen's my mark, and we'll be in Bristol about eleven."

He was as good as his word, and it seemed to Walter a very short time before they arrived on the outskirts of the ancient port of the west. Just before reaching Old Market Street they stopped and Walter got off. He shook hands with the driver at parting.

The latter looked at him intently. "Young 'un," he said, "I've half a suspicion you're down on your luck. Well, keep your pecker up! I've been through a bit myself."

"Thanks very much," replied Walter. "Fact is, I'm trying to find a sea-going job. Is this a likely place?"

"That I can't tell you. All the big stuff works out of Avonmouth mostly, but you can try your luck here first. It's a rough life for a gentleman," he added thoughtfully. "I've a brother-in-law who ran away to sea as a lad. He had a rotten time the first year or two, but he's chief officer now—first mate—on a big

tramp out of Liverpool. His wife and two kiddies live very tidy over Birkenhead way."

Walking on through the narrow streets in the centre of the old city, Walter arrived eventually at Bristol Bridge. He stood there a moment, uncertain which way to go next ; then a man, who was busily engaged in leaning over the parapet, took his pipe from his lips, and, using the stem as a pointer, made a gratuitous contribution to the boy's stock of local historical knowledge.

" That's the church where Cromwell stabled his horses, that is," he said.

Walter nodded, but the subject did not interest him particularly. His gaze was directed towards the shipping. He could see no large vessels. Walking along the quay he passed some small steam barges, but he knew that they would be of no use to him. Then he came to coasting vessels of a larger class, but every inquiry he made about a berth on one of them was met by the same reply.

" Nothing doing here, my lad. Full up. Plenty of real seamen about without taking landlubbers."

He abandoned all idea of getting aboard a big ship, and would have accepted gladly a job on the humblest coaster. Nearing Hotwells, he came upon a number of smart pleasure steamers fitting out for the season's trips. He asked if there was any chance of a job, and was referred to the office, only to be disappointed once more. " Sorry, but we're full up. You see, most of our men come back to us regularly year after year ; " which was the kindliest reception he had so far met with.

Tired and hungry, he turned into a little coffee shop for a meal ; then, climbing the steep hill out of Avon gorge, he reached the downs, and, after inquiring the way, headed for the Stoke Bishops Road leading to Avonmouth. It was a pleasant enough walk, or would have been under other circumstances. He had left

the downs behind when he caught sight of a piece of stick lying by the roadside; it looked as though it would make a good walking-stick. He picked it up, and as he went on he chanted to himself, "A stick and a smile—a stick and a smile."

Coming at length to the bottom of a steep hill, he found a bridge, with a low stone parapet that afforded a comfortable seat. He rested there for a time, shaded from the sun, and took stock. "Three shillings spent so far. . . . Bed and breakfast would be four or five shillings—supper a bob. . . . No, it can't be done. . . . May as well get used to roughing it at once, or I may not be able to hold out long enough." His experience already had taught him that he might have to tramp many miles round the coast, and perhaps wait several days, before he could get a berth. "I'll sleep out; then buy a decent breakfast, and make shift for the day on what food I can carry with me. . . . Three shillings a day will keep me going over three weeks."

He must have sat on the bridge longer than he thought, for he felt stiff when he got up, and his watch said it was nearly seven o'clock. Farther on he came to a little cottage shop, and bought some buns, a bit of cheese, and a banana. He pocketed them, and proceeded to look out for a likely place for passing the night.

At a cross-road he noticed the direct route for Avonmouth leading through a park; but before him lay a stretch of rough wooded land—evidently a recognised place for picnics: several parties had been spending the day there and were now packing up their traps. He walked on until he came to a broad, grassy space, well screened by trees, then to a small quarry. It was sheltered and dry, and there was a good deal of brushwood lying about.

He sat down to wait until the last of the picknickers had moved off, and while doing so, his eye lit upon a

small erection of boughs and dried grass, which, on inspection, proved to be some attempt at a bivouac or hut, probably made by Boy Scouts. It looked scarcely weather-tight, but a pile of leaves and grass inside was inviting, and a circle of stones near the entrance had evidently been used as a fire-place: some wood for fuel was still lying around it.

"Good luck to the chaps," he exclaimed. "They've done me a good turn anyway."

He ate his supper; then, with his head resting on his haversack for a pillow, and his raincoat drawn over him, he turned in and was soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

BRIDGWATER BILL

HE was aroused next morning by the screech of a blackbird in a neighbouring bush, to find the sun already well above the group of tall trees that edged King's Weston Down. He sprang up with a start.

"Jove! I must have slept ten solid hours. This won't do!"

It did not take him long to dress, for, beyond taking off his boots and unloosening his collar, he had not undressed when turning in overnight. The sleep had done him good: the feeling of dejection that had settled down upon him as the result of yesterday's disappointing experiences had lifted, and on this bright summer morning the outlook seemed much more hopeful.

"To-day is Saturday," he said to himself as he folded up his raincoat and stowed it away in the haversack. "Lots of boats sail to-day, and quite likely one

will be short-handed at the last moment." He laughed light-heartedly as his thoughts took wing and bore him onward and away from sombre realities. "Why, this time to-night I may be out at sea, bound for South America or China, or goodness knows where."

In which sanguine frame of mind, and with a keen appetite for breakfast as soon as an opportunity presented itself of getting one, he went back to the cross-roads, turned into Shirehampton Park, and continued steadily on until he reached the outskirts of Avonmouth. Here he obtained breakfast at a small refreshment shop—eggs and bacon, and coffee, price two shillings—and had a much-needed wash.

One thing weighing rather heavily on his mind now was the thought of the anxiety his parents would be feeling on his account. He had written to them before leaving the school, telling them of the step he proposed to take, and they would have got the letter the previous night. He resolved that it would be no use writing again yet—not until he had something more definite to say.

At the entrance to Avonmouth Docks he experienced a momentary check: a policeman stood right in his path, keeping a watchful eye on people passing in and out. Clearly he must have an answer ready if he were asked what business he had there—and he was not by any means sure that his actual business would be sufficient to gain him admission. He must use a certain amount of diplomacy. Instantly there jumped to his mind the military maxim that attack is the best defence, and he decided on a bold course. Crossing to the constable, he asked him where the Canadian Pacific Railway offices were—a pretty safe question, prompted by the sight of the initials of that great company painted in large letters on some sheds a little distance away.

It answered his purpose. "Keep straight on till you

pass those trucks; then turn to your left," was the reply.

He went on as directed, but when he arrived at the trucks, instead of turning to the left, he continued straight ahead until he reached the Royal Edward Dock.

"Now for it!" he muttered grimly; and, going aboard the first ship he came to, he asked for a berth. He went through the same formula at the second, and the third, and again and again, but everywhere met with the same reply: there was no berth vacant. Sometimes it came bluntly and without hesitation, and sometimes only after he had waited, hoping against hope, to see an officer; but in either case the result was equally disappointing.

The remainder of the morning was consumed in the unavailing search; and in the afternoon he made his way to the old Avonmouth Dock, but met with no better success.

It was about four o'clock when, returning along the quay, a gruff voice hailed him. Turning, he saw a tall, lean man, awkwardly sitting on a bollard, eyeing him curiously.

"What's your game, young man? What are you looking for?"

Walter looked steadily into the sharp eyes turned upon him, and noticed an outcrop of sandy grey hair edging from under an old peaked cap.

"I'm looking for a ship," he replied.

"What ship do you want? Where's she from?"

"Oh, any ship. I want to get a job aboard."

"I see. Well, the ship you're after is called hardship."

"I'm not afraid of roughing it, nor of hard work."

"Oh, ay, I know your sort—copper-nobbed and stubborn. You've got pluck enough, I daresay."

Walter laughed to hear his old nickname drop accidentally from the lips of a stranger.

"Why is it no one will take me on?" he asked. "I've been round every ship in these docks and Bristol."

"Well, of course, it might be as how they've none of 'em got a vacant berth; though, to tell you straight, I hardly reckon as you'd get it if they had."

"Why, what's wrong with me?"

"Nothing much maybe. Of course, you're green, but you could learn. One reason is, you don't look the chap for it. You look more cut out for a shore-going job."

The man knocked the dottle out of his pipe, rubbed it up gently, then economically replaced it and tried it with a match.

"Then again," he went on, "there's the Seamen's Union, where a list of likely lads is always ready, and officers reckon to pick up boys there and keep on good terms with the Union. Likewise, the Union doesn't fancy young fellers like you gettin' took on on your own, so to speak."

"So that's it, is it. But I'm willing to work—why should anyone want to stop me?"

"I don't say as anyone does. All I says is, you don't look the part, and the Union can supply all the ships' boys likely to be asked for—ay, and most of 'em bred and born amongst shipping: fathers at sea or working in these 'ere docks."

Walter felt dismayed. The difficulties were greater than he had anticipated, and he stood silent for a moment or two, until the man spoke again.

"'Tain't my business, of course, but what sort of trouble have you been getting into?"

"Nothing serious. I've made a bit of a mess of things at school, and failed to get a scholarship. I don't want to go home like that, so I've made up my mind to go to sea and work my way up."

A broad grin came across the face of his questioner. "Well, I'm blowed! Something like my young 'un.

His mother fancied he'd win 'xaminations and such like, and get on better nor his father."

"And didn't he?"

"No; he's deck-hand now on a trawler, getting some common sense knocked into him."

Walter accepted the implied challenge. "Right you are!" he cried. "Now, tell me how to get some of that common sense knocked into me."

Tapping his now empty pipe, the man replied, "First of all, get rid o' them fancy togs. Get into blue serge and a jersey—all the better if they don't look brand new."

"I'm afraid I haven't money enough to buy more clothes," objected Walter.

"Well, then you must swop them you've got. Now, listen to me. Go out of these dock gates, and up the road till you come to the church; turn down there, second on the left, and you'll see a second-hand shop. Go there, and tell old Moss Banks as Bridgwater Bill sent you, and he's to treat you fair."

"Thanks very much; I'll go. But where do you recommend me to look for a ship?"

"That's harder to say. You won't get one here yet a bit, and I don't reckon there's anything doing over to Portishead. Maybe you'd better make for Sharpness, and if that's no good, get round South Wales. Don't forget the little ports: you might stand a better chance in one of 'em. Do you know anything at all about the sea?"

"I've been out with the pilots from Falmouth several times. You know those quay punts?—they are good sea boats."

"Ay, that they are. They tackle wonderful bad weather off the Lizard. Well, if you've done a bit that way, say so. Don't shout it too loud, but just say you know that much."

And with a parting "Good luck to you!" Bridg-

water Bill put his pipe in his mouth and prepared to watch Walter out of sight.

It was in no very jovial mood that the boy made his way round to the shop of Mr. Moss Banks. By swapping his good clothes for a seaman's outfit he would indeed be burning his boats, but there seemed no alternative. He must take the step or fail in his enterprise : it was no time for half-measures.

Moss Banks appeared to be of Jewish extraction, and Walter was not surprised to find his name spelt "Moses." The little man was in his shop doorway, and when Walter stated his errand he rather fussily invited him inside. He showed signs of disappointment when he learnt that it was not a case of cash but of exchange ; but Bridgwater Bill's name acted as a talisman.

"Any friend of Bridgwater is a friend of mine. He's a good man, and I shall never forget him."

Walter could not help feeling curious concerning the reason for this warm attachment, but he refrained from asking questions ; and the old dealer was naturally reluctant to explain that, but for his friend Bridgwater Bill, he would in all probability have been behind prison bars at that moment, on a charge of which, left to himself, he would have found it hard to prove himself innocent.

"Yes, he is a good sort," said Walter. "He said you'd treat me fairly."

"It is very good fortune for you," remarked Mr. Banks. "I think I can find a customer for your suit, and I've got a blue serge coat and trousers, only wore one week, just about your size. Oh, it's a beautiful bit of cloth—wear you well."

The deal was quite a lengthy business, but at last Walter came out of the shop dressed in the "beautiful" blue serge coat and trousers, a warm jersey—which soon began to chafe his neck—and a new peaked

cap ; and carrying, in place of his haversack, a kit bag wherein reposed oilskins, which he had exchanged for his raincoat. He had retained all his underclothing and boots, and had parted with only five shillings of his precious money.

At first he felt a trifle self-conscious as he walked along the road, but reflected by-and-by that he was attracting no more notice—in fact, probably less—than when he had been well-dressed, carrying his large haversack.

Looking over his map, he discovered that he could make Sharpness without returning to Bristol. He bought some food, then trudged slowly back through Shirehampton Park ; and, as the day had been a tiring one, he decided to spend a second night in the scouts' bivouac.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

A SHIP AT LAST

THE next day was one of the strangest Sundays that Walter could ever remember. A drizzling rain was falling when he awoke, and he put on the clumsy oilskin coat, which seemed to weigh him down. Then the collar of the rough jersey made his neck really sore, and to ease the chafing he placed a handkerchief round inside it—which made him feel hot and choky.

He walked several miles before he obtained a breakfast, and he sat as long over the meal as he decently could. Throughout the day he kept steadily on. The rain cleared off, and the weather became oppressively hot. Near Berkeley he turned aside into a patch of woodland to rest : there was no need to hurry, for the

distance to Sharpness was not great, and he was not likely to find a berth on a Sunday afternoon.

It was evening when he reached the little Severn port, and without much difficulty he found a comfortable lodging for the night at the cottage of a Mrs. Huggins, a motherly body, who had sons of her own at sea, and was therefore predisposed to sympathy with one who, as she judged from his appearance, followed the same calling. He went to bed at an early hour, and the clean white sheets felt particularly luxurious after the hard ground on which he had slept the preceding two nights. It seemed as if he had scarcely closed his eyes when there came a tap at the door, and his landlady informed him that it was six o'clock.

After a homely but substantial breakfast of rashers, and bread fried in the bacon-fat, he went down to the dock, and, going straight up to a gate-keeper, asked him if he knew of any ship wanting a spare hand. Somehow his sea-going clothes were giving him confidence.

"Can't say as I do," came the reply. "You won't do no harm asking on them two grain boats. Them others down by the timber float is laid up. There's the *Mercia* on the far side—that there blue-and-black funnel. She hasn't a crew, but she won't be sailing for a week or two yet."

Walter worked his way round the dock, meeting with the usual negative answer to his application at every ship he came to; and eventually he reached the *Mercia* Some engine-room repairs were in progress, and he was fortunate enough to catch the captain aboard.

"No, my lad, I'm not signing on a crew yet," said the latter. "Maybe I could do with you if you were here next Saturday week."

Walter expressed his thanks. This was the nearest

approach to success he had so far encountered, and he left the dock still without a berth, though not without hope. At a pinch he could hold out for two weeks more, but in the meantime he would go on with his search.

The broad river Severn lay between him and the road to the South Wales ports. Consulting his map, he decided that, rather than spend two days walking round by Gloucester—where indeed there was a small dock, but one that was hardly likely to be of use to him—he had better cross the Severn Bridge by train. There was one due at 11.50 a.m. : this would give him time to walk as far as Chepstow, if not Newport, before night.

As the train, consisting of an engine and two coaches, crept slowly over the narrow bridge, Walter saw on the farther side the small harbour of Lydney, with one or two vessels lying in it—colliers, probably, carrying coal from the Forest of Dean mines ; and leaving the train at the first station, he made his way thither.

About two o'clock he found himself near the Great Western Railway Station. A sharp shower of rain induced him to take shelter under an archway leading to the booking-office, where presently he was joined by two men—ships' officers of some sort, apparently, though what their rank might be Walter did not know. The subject of their talk, however, at once riveted his attention.

" Ay, it's a proper broken leg," said one, evidently the superior. " He'll not be about for six weeks or more. He was a decent lad, but too darned fond of larking about. I'll have to wire Newport for another hand. The crowd 'ud growl if I put to sea one short, but I'm not going to miss the morning tide."

Walter jumped forward. " Beg your pardon, sir," he exclaimed ; " I'm looking for a ship."

The man turned sharply and looked him up and down ; then remarked, " You are, are you. Got your discharges ? "

" No, sir. I've never been to sea before properly—only in pilot boats out of Falmouth."

" Never been in steam ? "

" No, sir."

" H-m-m. Well, can you do as you're told, and do it quick ? "

" Yes, sir."

One or two further questions were asked and answered—satisfactorily, it would seem, for at the end of the catechism, the man, speaking with the authority proper in the captain of a ship, said, " All right ; I'll give you a trial at two pound a month. If you're any good I'll pay you ordinary seamen's wages after the first month."

Walter's delight showed in his face. " Thank you, sir, very much," he said. " I'll make good, I promise you."

" Very well. My ship's the *Raglan*. Get aboard, and wait till I come to sign you on. Say Captain Bream sent you."

Walter touched his cap. " Ay, ay, sir," he said, in what he hoped was seamanlike fashion ; then he hurried away over the railway crossing to the quayside.

The *Raglan* was a small steamer of about fifteen hundred tons, black and grimy with the coal that was being loaded into her, yet showing signs of having been built for a better-class trade. Her bow, clean-cut and shapely, stood out in contrast to another obvious collier lying beside her, whose bluff lines suggested that she pushed the sea in front of her rather than drove her way through it ; and a seafaring man would have pointed out details in her superstructure not common in a vessel whose sole business it was to carry black diamonds to foreign shores.

Walter was agreeably surprised at the size of the *Raglan* when he sighted her after a long walk along the banks of the canal-like creek known as Lydney Dock. On his way he had passed only small sailing vessels—ketches and schooners, and one steam barge—and it had occurred to him that so small and rustic a creek could never contain a ship of any size. It gave him a thrill of pleasure to find that he was to join a decent ship after all—at any rate, so far as outward appearances went.

Clambering past a small hoist, where a ten-ton truck was being slowly tilted to empty its contents into the open hatchway, dimly seen through a cloud of dust, Walter found a narrow gangway leading up amidships, and got aboard. A grimy man, in a peaked cap and a blue suit much the worse for wear, saw him and shouted, "Well, what do you want?"

"Captain Bream ordered me to come aboard and wait for him. I'm going to sign on, sir."

Walter added the "sir" to be on the safe side, for he guessed that the speaker was an officer.

"Right. You can get for'ard and put your kit in the starboard fo'c'sle."

"Thank you, sir," replied Walter; and slipping down a ladder to the well-deck, he scrambled past a pile of hatches and other gear to two narrow iron doorways leading to the men's quarters. They were marked with small metal tablets, one "Crew," the other "Firemen."

Entering the former, he found the place empty. Along the ship's side were eight bunks, six of which contained rough bedding, two being unoccupied. Several kit-bags, oilskins, and other articles of clothing hung from pegs on the divisions. A much-stained narrow table ran fore and aft, and lockers answered the purpose of seats.

Walter threw his bag into an empty berth, then returned to the deck. He looked on for a moment at

the work in progress, wondering whether he would be expected to assist. He had yet to learn that loading is the work of "trimmers," in which the crew take no part except under special circumstances. When they do, they are entitled to extra pay for it.

The second mate who had previously spoken to him now hailed:

"If you're looking for a job, my lad, slip into the alley-way and give the bo'sun a hand."

With a brisk "Ay, ay, sir!" Walter went in the direction indicated, and found himself in a narrow passage divided off into various cabins on the outer side, with entrances to the engine room and the ship's galley opposite. One of these cabins was evidently being used as a store-room, and an elderly man was busy lifting out drums, paint pots, and odds and ends of miscellaneous gear. He looked up as Walter approached, then rose and straightened his back.

"The officer on deck told me to give you a hand here," said Walter to explain his presence.

"What, has the cap'n signed you on in Curly's place?"

"Captain Bream said he'd sign me on when he returns aboard."

"Oh, did he? Well, till you're signed on it ain't nobody's place to give you orders. After that, in course you obeys orders double quick. How did he come to find you in a one-eyed port like this?"

Walter told him how it had happened, and gave a few particulars concerning himself; then added eagerly, "I'm ready to lend a hand if you want me to."

"Well, you can reach that stuff up out of that corner. Your back'll bend easier'n mine."

It was nearly five o'clock when the captain returned. He passed along the alley-way with a man, who, Walter discovered later, was chief engineer, and very obviously hailed from north of the Tweed.

"Well, my lad, you've got started. Going to be any use to us, Bo'sun?"

"Seems willing enough, sir; but he's green—knows more about handlin' a quay punt out o' Falmouth than paint brushes and cleanin' brass-work."

"If he's willing he'll learn," commented the captain. "Come up to the chart-house. I'll sign you on there: this port hasn't a proper Board of Trade official handy."

In the chart-room Walter hesitated a moment about giving his name.

"No business of mine," said the captain, "but what name you give me will be on your discharge papers; and if, as you say, you want to work your way up, you'd better stick to your right name unless you want to drop it altogether."

The name "Walter Buckland" was duly entered.

"You can be called Walters amongst the crowd if that suits your fancy. Sign this advance note; and here's a pound for you. You can go ashore till eleven o'clock—no later: we sail on the early morning tide."

Walter found means of getting a wash, drying himself as best he could on a handkerchief; then stepped ashore, and, no longer encumbered with the heavy kit-bag, walked briskly back to the town. He made one or two purchases—he felt that he could now spare the money: a pair of sea-boots, a towel and some soap; also some letter paper and envelopes. While he was waiting for a meal to be served in an eating-house, he took the opportunity of writing a letter home. It was brief, but it would at any rate allay anxiety. "Don't worry about me. . . . I have found a ship, and shall be all right. . . Will write again soon."

Afterwards he saw a stream of people entering a cinema, and although he had never been greatly attracted by film plays, the title of the chief item on

the programme, "Robin Hood," seemed to promise something rather more interesting than usual, so he paid sixpence and went in; and for an hour or so forgot his own troubles in watching the high-handed manner in which the noted outlaw of Sherwood Forest disposed of his.

It was nearly dark when he came out. A policeman directed him by a short cut to the old church, whence he soon reached the dockside, and tramped on steadily to his ship. Arriving alongside, he saw that the work of loading was finished; and peace would have reigned had it not been that a solitary voice was raised in a cheerful roar, breaking the silence of the night with an old sailing-ship shanty.

Getting close to the gangway, Walter saw a man slowly dragging himself aboard, clinging firmly to the hand-rope; and as he hauled himself up he sang:

"To *my*—
Aye,
And we'll *furl*—
Aye,
And *pay* Paddy *Doyle* for his *boots*;

We'll *heave*—
Aye,
With a *swing*—
Aye,
And we'll *pay* Paddy *Doyle* for his *boots*."

He seemed to have some little difficulty in negotiating the last step over the edge on to the deck, and would probably have gone sprawling had not Walter stepped up behind and steadied him down.

"That's it, my lad—thankee; that's the proper way to bear a hand. Don't know who you are anyhow."

"I've got Curly's job," said Walter. "He's in hospital."

" So he is—that's all fair an' above board—so he is." The old seaman staggered to the ladder leading to the for'ard well-deck, and lowered himself steadily down. He looked at the open hatch and muttered, " Just finished chuckin' the muck into her—lazy lot o' swabs—dockside loafers ; " then, feeling for a pile of hatches clear of the winch, he sat down and again broke into song :

" In Hamsterdam there dwelt a maid,
Mark well what I do say."

He finished the first verse and was starting on a second, when a voice from the fo'c'sle hailed him.

" Shut that blinking row, you old wind-jammer! "

The old man raised himself up. " Wind-jammer, am I ? Yes, wind-jammer, that's true, an' a proper sailor-man, too—not a spit-and-polish brass-cleaner like you steamboat deckhands. A sailor-man, I am—hand-reef an' steer, an' don't you forget it. Been round the Horn more times than I've got fingers. All you lot is fit for is sloshing down decks an' chippin' paint—ay, an' you can't do that tidy."

" That's all right, Jack, that's all right. Come an' turn in."

" Ay, turn in! All you lot think of is turn in an' soft grub. I can keep goin' a week an' do my bit."

" Been havin' a good time at the ' Anchor ' ? " asked his questioner.

" Fair to middlin', but liquor ain't what it used to be."

Another voice now joined in : " Jack's been havin' two or three."

" Two or three—two or three! What's two or three to me ? I can carry my liquor when the smell of a bunghole would knock you swabs galley-west! "

" Right oh, Jack. We know you never got your nose through using a red pocket handkercher."

Jack's fund of repartee was getting rapidly exhausted. He merely muttered again, "I'm a Cape Horner, I am;" then, hauling himself into the fo'c'sle, now lit by an electric bulb dimly seen through a fog of tobacco smoke, he demanded: "What time do we sail, Ginger?" to which his chief tormentor replied, civilly, "Bo'sun says it's all hands at six bells."

"That's better, my lad; that's sea talk—though I wonder ye didn't call it—let's see, what is it?—three o'clock hay em."

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

LEARNING THE ROPES

WALTER stood hesitantly at the fo'c'sle door for a moment while the old Cape Horner settled himself on a locker; then, with a certain diffidence, he entered, to be met with a volley of questions. "Who are you?" "What, have you got Curly's job?" "What was your last ship?"

Walter's reply that he had never been to sea before, except for knocking about a little in Falmouth quay punts, was received with approval by Cape Horn Jack.

"You've been in the hands of proper sailormen there. They ain't no common deck-wallopers;" and the old argument would have broken our afresh if someone had not diverted it with a further question: "What's your moniker?"

Conceiving this to refer to his name, the boy answered, "Walters," but only slightly sounded the final "s."

"Walter," growled old Jack; "Walter—can't say I ever heard of that as a sea-going name."

"But there was Walter Raleigh—he was quite a good seaman, wasn't he?" protested Walter.

"Never heard tell of him. What was he—Navy bloke or merchant service?"

A thin, shrill voice broke in with a laugh, and all eyes were turned upon a pale-faced little man who had not hitherto spoken.

"Well, I'm blowed! Cape Horn Jack hasn't heard of Sir Walter Raleigh who discovered America;" and his words ended in a chuckle.

"Can't say I have. Nobody ever mentioned him to me; an' look here, me lad, I've set foot in the States more times than you've sailed out o' dock."

"But Walter Raleigh was one of the biggest men in the world's hist'ry."

"Aw, go on; get it off your chest, History Dick, or there'll be no peace in this blinkin' fo'c'sle to-night. Go on; who was he? —I'll buy it;" and with that the old man leaned back with an expression of boredom and disgust, while the others, well used to the style of History Dick, gave way and waited.

"Sir Walter Raleigh lived a matter of four hundred years ago"—a groan from old Jack. "He discovered America and invented tobacco. When he came back to England King Henry chopped his head off, and he said——"

"What, after his bloomin' head was off? Clever bloke!"

"No, when he was on the scaffold. He said, 'If I had served my Gawd same as I've served my king, you wouldn't find "Calais" written on my heart.'"

"Well," ejaculated old Jack, amazed, "by the old cow's horn in Paddy Doyle's back yard, I never knew tattooing was invented them days. But, look here, what did the king chop his head off for, eh?"

"That ain't exactly recorded in hist'ry, but some folk say it was because he bolted with one of King

Henry's eight wives, and got cotched trying to make for Calais."

"All right; that'll go for a yarn. But I can't reckon on calling this 'ere young feller 'Walter.' It don't ring seamanlike." The old man cast his eyes over the boy, who, though thoroughly amused, thought it best to keep silence. "Likewise we can't call him 'Ginger'—that's your private mark, Brown;" and the man indicated nodded in agreement.

"Call him 'Carrots,' then."

"'Carrots'—no; 'Carrots' be blowed! This is a ship's fo'c'sle, not a farmyard; 'sides, a lad out of the pilot boats ain't no farmer." Old Jack's preference for any form of sailing ship over a steamboat was evidently going to be of some service to Walter. "No such name as 'Carrots' for a tidy lad, A1 at Lloyd's, well-found and copper-bottomed."

"Copper-nobbed you mean, Jack," laughed a seaman.

"Ay, copper-nobbed; so he is; and that makes a tidy name. Walter, my lad, you're entered on the articles as 'Coppernob,' and when you 'ears it you jump quick."

"Good enough," answered Walter. "I'll remember."

One of the lower bunks, which had been Curly's, was pointed out to him, and he prepared to turn into it. "My jolly old nickname must be a mascot," he thought to himself. He remembered Bridgwater Bill's use of it at Avonmouth; and then his mind ran back to the day—long ago, it seemed—when, as a junior running in the quarter-mile, he had heard an excited crowd yelling, "Coppernob! Coppernob! Go on—stick it!" and finally, "Coppernob wins!"

At six bells they were roused out, and Walter, taking a lead from the others, pulled on his clumsy sea-boots. He felt handicapped, not to say hobbled, in them, for

the thick soles were stiff to bend, and once or twice he stumbled. He was told off to work with others on the poop, where the second mate was giving orders. The stern hawser was led to a steam capstan operated by a seaman, and Walter stood behind to coil it down, or at any rate to keep it clear.

A blast on the syren was followed by a shrill whistle from the bridge; then the engine-room bell tinkled, and, with a sullen throb, the propeller began to turn slowly.

With her stern rope taut and her bow hawser slacked off, the *Raglan* edged away from the little wharf. Along the shore men carried the large eye-spliced ends of the hawsers from bollard to bollard, slipping them on or lifting them at the pilot's orders, till at last the vessel passed through the lock gates, thrown wide open to the high tide. In the grey dawn Sharpness could be distinguished across the river, and the Severn Bridge loomed up dark against the pale sky.

But there was little time for gazing about. Ropes had to be coiled down, and the decks generally tidied up. The open hatchways had to be securely fastened, first with hatches, then with stout tarpaulins, held on each side by an iron bar wedged into place with wooden chocks.

As Walter looked on at all this heavy gear being fastened in position it seemed to him that nothing short of an earthquake could shift it; yet he knew enough of the sea to understand that the stoutest hatch might carry away in a gale if it were not well and truly secured, and if that happened, the seas breaking aboard would soon put the vessel in difficulties, and possibly cause her to founder.

By the time the derricks were lowered and made fast it was half-past seven. Walter's watch was then ordered below for breakfast, which he found it was

his duty to carry from the galley. It consisted of thick rashers of bacon, tea, bread, and something that answered to the name of butter, but should more properly have been called margarine.

Cape Horn Jack and History Dick were his two table-mates. Jack, being the senior, helped himself first, then Dick, leaving almost a third of the food for Walter—certainly more than he felt himself capable of demolishing, though he did his best. There was no sugar on the table, but condensed milk took the raw edge off the strong black tea. There was one battered tea-spoon, in the use of which Walter discerned some sort of etiquette. Jack took a good spoonful of the viscous mixture, emptied it into his mug, stirred it, licked the spoon, then washed it in his tea so that it came out reasonably clean. Dick did the same; and then Walter, not without a qualm though he did not want to give offence, followed their example.

Except for the sound of energetic mastication, the meal was eaten in silence. At last Cape Horn Jack wiped his enamelled plate round with the last of the bread, and leaned back to load a black clay pipe.

"Well, young feller-me-lad," he remarked to Walter, "you've got started steamboatin', which is the next best thing to sailin'. I didn't hear the second greaser cussin' you, so I reckon you're making yourself handy."

"I hope so," said Walter cheerfully; "though I got cussed for laying a rope wrong way round."

"Ay, so you did, and quite right too. Lay a rope wrong, an' it'll come up all foul just when it's wanted most to run clear. I reckon I'll have to give you a bit o' larnin' on that an' a few other things."

"I'd be glad if you would. I don't know much about it yet."

"Well, I reckon I can teach you," continued Jack.

" Why, I've nearly made a sailor-man of Dick 'ere, but his head's too full of hist'ry."

Dick was busy overhauling some of his kit, so he contented himself with replying briefly, " You go an boil your head, old 'un."

With a satisfied chuckle, the old man went on, " You'll be in for a field day to-day, me lad."

" What's a field day ? " queried Walter.

" All work an' no watch below. It's like this 'ere. We're on next watch ; then at eight bells—midday, you understand—we're supposed to be below till the first dog-watch ; but on this bloomin' packet, with only four A.B.'s and two or'naries—counting yourself as one, though you ain't yet—we're short-'anded."

" Short-'anded be blowed ! " ejaculated Dick. " We're full Board o' Trade, an' two over."

" That's as may be, Mister Knowall ; but the Board o' Trade reckons we've nowt to do but take the helm, keep some sort of look-out, and lie around and spit an' smoke, while the black squad shovels coal an' pushes her along—leastways, that's how it seems to me."

Walter's next job was to clear the dirty pans off the table and wash them.

" You do that for our watch," explained Jack, " an' Derry, being rated O.S., does it for his. Don't let him land it on you, 'cause you ain't exactly rated ship's boy, though likewise you ain't O.S. yet."

As the day went on Walter became acquainted with various aspects of modern steamboat practice to which he had not previously given much thought. To begin with, he helped wash down the decks, the bo'sun handling a hose while the men scrubbed with stiff bristle brooms. This took till six bells—11 a.m.—when the ship was well down the Bristol Channel, roughly opposite Porlock, with the Foreland light-house on the port bow.

Then he found himself told off to scrub out the mate's cabin, a task that was more in the nature of housemaid's work than seamanship; but he did it thoroughly. Then eight bells were made, and he carried dinner to the fo'c'sle and rejoined Jack and Dick. Conversation languished, for they had already been nine hours out of their berths, and old Jack felt like sneaking forty winks if possible before being called out for another job.

Walter cleared the plates, and found that Derry had left him a double dose of washing up to do. The cook —or, in sea-going language, the "doctor"—grinned. "He's put it acrost you," he said, and Walter privately determined that he would take an early opportunity of having a clear understanding with Derry. Then the bo'sun called him.

"Up on the bridge, my lad, and polish all brass-work."

With rags and polish he made the binnacle, the engine-room telegraph, and all the bright parts of the patent sounding machine shine. It was a long job, for there were a good many awkward corners to be got into; but he did it at last to his own satisfaction, and fancied, also, he saw the captain give an approving look at his work.

Eight bells once more (4 p.m.): they were now well below Hartland. Walter was told to stand look-out for the first dog-watch. This he regarded as a more seamanlike job than scrubbing, and, tired as he was, he paced the fo'c'sle head with a feeling of pride in this new responsibility. Nevertheless, he was not sorry when the watch ended, and for two hours he was free.

His next surprise, on turning out at 8 p.m., was to be told genially by the bo'sun that he could be farmer for the next couple of hours. Wondering what "farmer" might be, he turned towards History Dick, who was grinning at him.

"Lor', ain't you a green 'un, Coppernob. Proper name for you—'farmer.' Go an' turn in till four bells, same as any farmer ashore; but stand by to jump out quick in case you are called, 'cause officially like you're supposed to be on deck."

Two further hours of sleep were very acceptable, and when, at 10 p.m., he was ordered up to stand look-out, the last fading glow of day was colouring the sky, and lighthouses winked brightly from the Cornish coast. At midnight he was again free to seek his bunk, and as he rolled into it, he unconsciously quoted the usual closing phrase of the daily record in a ship's log-book: "So ends this day."

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

A FOREIGN PORT

WHEN next Walter returned to the deck the *Raglan* was well up the English Channel, with the Lizard somewhere over her port quarter. He was hailed from the bridge, and responded with alacrity, but found, to his disappointment, that the duty to be assigned to him had nothing to do with navigation.

The fact was that the mate wanted hot coffee, and at 4 a.m. the "doctor" was not on duty and the galley fire was out. Walter was instructed to secure a kettle or pot, and climb down into the stokehold, where a fireman would give him a shovelful of glowing cinders on which he could boil it.

Cape Horn Jack was at the wheel. "I reckon you've got savvy enough to make coffee for three," he remarked in a loud aside; and at the same time Walter thought he heard a sound that might have

been a snigger come from the direction of the mate, which he took to be a further hint in the same direction. "A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse," he thought, and departed on his errand.

"Look here, you old Cape Horner," said the mate, as soon as the boy was out of earshot, "that younker will learn mischief quick enough without you teaching him;" to which Jack, exercising the privilege of an old hand, replied, "Ay, ay, sir; but it blows a bit raw like till the sun gets up."

"So it does, but the sun won't get over the foreyard on this ship, so you'll make shift on coffee."

"Sun over the foreyard" was understood to mean a fitting time for a tot of rum or whisky. Jack chuckled. "Coffee'll suit me fine, sir."

Walter found the stokehold distinctly stuffy, and the man who spoke to him gruff. In many ships there is little love lost between the engineering staff and the seamen—a state of things that affects officers as well as men, and in most instances starts with the former.

There was just a little of this spirit manifest on the *Raglan*, notably between the second mate and the second engineer, and it had arisen in this way. One day the former had asked, in a tone that was more of an order than a request, for water to be pumped by the donkey-engine for hose work. The second engineer had resented what he took to be an assumption of superiority on the part of the mate; and consequently the latter had got, not only water, but a burst hose pipe. For this he blamed the engineer, saying that he had turned the water on too strong at first; to which the engine-room replied that the water had been pumped through quite gently, but that the pipe had been laid in an unseamanlike manner, and that it was rotten with neglect; etc., etc. Possibly a similar argument is running at the present moment on a thousand other ships the world over.

Walter eventually got his kettle well aboil. He half-filled his coffee-pot, and, having discovered an opened tin of condensed milk in the galley (he didn't know it was the doctor's private property), he made a liberal supply of hot milk, commandeered two enamelled mugs, and returned to the bridge.

"You luxurious young cub! Where did you win this milk?" demanded the mate.

Walter explained, quite innocently, and the mate laughed grimly.

"Jack, you'd better keep this young Communist out of the doctor's course till I get a tin passed to him, or there'll be murder."

He took a long pull at the coffee and handed the mug to Jack. "There's a drop left for you," he said. "Catch hold of the wheel, my lad, and keep her steady —sou'-east by east."

"Sou'-east by east, sir," answered Walter, who had already learned that it was a steersman's duty to repeat the course given by an officer, to show that he understood the order.

With a new hand at the helm, the *Raglan* first made a dive to port; then, as Walter hurriedly put the wheel over, made a similar dash to starboard.

"Meet her and steer small," said the mate shortly; then, as Walter began to get better control, "That's more like it. Now don't stare about you; keep your eye on the lubber's line and steer small."

Jack, seeing that Walter was getting the hang of his job, did not hurry over his coffee. At length he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and resumed his post. "Finish that stuff and wash up," he said.

The coffee was almost stone cold, but very acceptable all the same. Walter drank it eagerly, but the glow of pleasure he felt at the moment was due less to the stimulating quality of the liquid than to his recent experience at the helm.

He had not quite finished washing up when the cook came on duty. He sniffed round suspiciously, then picked up the condensed milk tin.

"You darned young shark of a landlubber!" he exclaimed; "if you don't know no better nor that I'll have to teach you with my boot toe."

"Sorry, doctor," replied Walter contritely; "hope there's enough left for your breakfast, and there's another full tin coming."

"Ho, there is, is there? An' I'd like to know who's likely to part up a tin on this hooker?"

"The tin is coming, honest Injun, so don't get ratty, doctor. I'm sorry, but I didn't know it was yours."

The cook looked at him, raised a wet swab in a threatening manner, then thought better of it and lowered it. "All right, now; if so be that tin comes, we'll say no more about it; but you larn to keep your fingers to yourself."

Having been called a "farmer" the previous night, Walter was not altogether surprised at next being addressed as "Peggy," the significance of which, he discovered without much trouble, was that he was expected to turn to and clean out the fo'c'sle. This was by no means a savoury task, but he found it would fall to him regularly, alternately with Derry, and he decided therefore to buckle to and get it over quickly. Later on his work chanced to be compared with Derry's, to the latter's disadvantage, and he was met with, "Ay, of course; Coppernob's Jack Horner's good boy for the time being, but maybe it won't last."

Walter's face flushed. "Look here, Derry," he exclaimed hotly, "I don't want a row with you, but I'll take you on fair fighting any time and anywhere you like. Savvy?"

Derry "savvied" all right. He was not particularly ill-natured, but easy-going to the point of laziness; he was ready to seize on any excuse for

his own slackness, and affected to despise any attempt at smartness on the part of others.

"If you get fresh with me," he replied, "I'll knock six bells out of you, so be civil. You're ship's boy for everyone to kick, and that includes me."

"Try it if you like," rejoined Walter, "and you'll never hear six bells struck again without remembering it."

Derry hardly fancied taking the risk, and after a moment's pause he concluded, "Well, there ain't no call to yet; but don't forget I've warned you."

Brass polishing, scrubbing, and a spell of look-out duty filled out the second day. The *Raglan* was now approaching the French coast, and that night anchor was droppeed outside the shallow banks fringing the entrance to Ouistreham, whence a short passage by canal would bring her to the ancient city of Caen.

At four o'clock the following morning the local pilot came aboard, the tide now being full; and all hands stood by to work the ship through the great stone locks. Walter's first impression of France was unusual. The voyage had commenced at a little out-of-the-way port, and was to end at a place equally sequestered from the main highway of the world's commerce. The canal ahead was bordered by rushes and trees; a curious little narrow-gauge railway followed the west bank; and the few scattered houses had wide windows and their wood-work gaily painted. Altogether the scene seemed unreal and almost toy-like.

Steaming slowly in accordance with the local regulations, drawing to one side at times to pass other vessels outward bound, threading carefully and accurately the narrow gaps where bridges were thrown open they came at length to the old cathedral city, and moored alongside a modern quay.

Walter learned that from the first dog-watch till midnight he would be allowed ashore.

"It's a wonderful historic place, Coppernob," began History Dick as they sat at dinner.

"Fat lot you know about it," growled old Jack, who, Walter began to suspect, rather enjoyed leading Dick on to talk.

"Well, it is, any'ow. William the Conqueror came from here."

"William the what?"

"William the Conqueror, what drove the Danes out of England. They buried him in that big church."

"Do you swallow that yarn, Coppernob?" demanded Jack.

"Well, partly, perhaps; but I thought the king who fought the Danes was Alfred."

Cape Horn Jack broke into a loud guffaw. "By the great fish-hook, Dick, my son, he's got to wind'ard of you. Not as I've got anything ag'in Danes, who are mostly tidy seamen, same as you can say of Norwegians an' Sou'wegians for the matter o' that; though, mark you, I've no manner o' use for a Finn;" and he aimed accurately at the spit-pan to emphasise his disgust.

"Well, I tell you William the Conqueror was the big shout here," resumed Dick, not at all nonplussed. "They buried him in that big church, and he was so ripe with travelling that his coffin carried away and dropped all anyhow into the grave. Scared all the priests, what reckoned Old Nick had grabbed him sudden like. And to this very day you can see the tapestry curtains what his missus sewed, with pictures of how her old man ran his navy acrost to England."

"Gurr!" grunted old Jack. "Never heard tell o' no such thing. Besides, tapestry ain't curtains—it's carpets, ain't it, Coppernob?"

"It might be, of course; but a bed-quilt is sometimes tapestry as well."

This reply seemed only to add to the confusion.

"You're both blinkin' idiots!" snapped Dick. "I means that sort o' sail-cloth stuff what old-fashioned kids used to sew their A B C on, and put 'Martha Jane done this, Aged 5,' on it."

A call from the deck put an end to the conversation. Nevertheless, when Walter went ashore Dick accompanied him, for though his history was weak, he was genuinely interested in old towns and buildings, and preferred to have a ramble round a foreign port to sitting in the local "sailor town" drinking.

They left Cape Horn Jack safely moored outside a brasserie, where he said the beer was "not too bad," and trying to get up an argument with some French seamen, of whose language he did not understand a word.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

A DERELICT

ON the homeward voyage the *Raglan* had a part cargo of Caen stone instead of making the trip light, and she was to discharge it at Swansea. Walter was falling into the normal routine of life on board quite comfortably, doing odd jobs, scrubbing cabins, cleaning brass-work, and generally making himself useful. The rule of never having more than four hours' sleep at any one time no longer troubled him; and the food, if coarse, was good.

About mid-channel, when he had finished polishing brass-work on the bridge, the captain suddenly ordered him to relieve the helm. The mate also was on the bridge at the time, and no doubt he had told Captain Bream of Walter's previous essay in the art of steering.

To be able to do this well, especially on a sailing vessel, is a natural gift. On a steamer the work is more mechanical, but even so, some men seem to steer well instinctively, while others invariably make hard work of it and never attain real proficiency.

"Y u're right, Mister," Captain Bream observed to the mate after watching Walter for a few minutes; "he's got it in him. He'll handle her better in a week than that fool Derry will in a hundred years."

To which the mate, pleased to find his own private judgment confirmed, replied, "I've noticed that any lad that old Cape Horner cottons on to seems to have sea sense. The old blackguard has a nose for seamen. I'd like to sail with a crew of his choosing."

"Ay, I've known him this twenty years. I'd have shipped him as bo'sun if he hadn't been canned when he asked for the berth."

"He'd make a good bo'sun, sir—which is not to say our man now isn't a tidy fellow."

For an hour, till the watches were changed, Walter remained at the wheel, and thenceforward took his regular turn. Bit by bit, at odd moments, the captain and mate sounded him respecting the extent of his sea knowledge. It was not much, it is true, and had been picked up on his trips, at holiday times, with the Falmouth pilots; but small as it was, it was good so far as it went, and it was destined to be an important factor in the shaping of his career.

At Swansea a cargo of anthracite coal was waiting for them. The Caen stone was quickly whipped out of the holds; then the great coal-hoists poured wagon-load after wagon-load into her, and once more the *Raglan* headed out of the Bristol Channel, bound this time for Rouen.

It was during the afternoon of the following day, when well out in the English Channel, having crossed the recognised steam lane for vessels bound up and

down, that a small yacht was sighted ahead. It was the mate's watch, and Walter was doing a trick at the wheel. He watched the little vessel making an erratic course, first sailing, then luffing up and spilling all the wind out of her sails, then falling off and sailing a few yards, only to come up into the wind once more.

"I wonder if there's some darned fool aboard her asleep," muttered the mate; and, seizing the light line leading to the syren, he blew a loud and lengthy blast.

This produced no visible result aboard the yacht, but brought Captain Bream on to the bridge of the *Raglan*.

"What do you make of her, Mister?" he asked as soon as he had noticed the cause of the mate's signal.

"Deserted, unless the man aboard her is helpless. She's a tidy-looking little craft."

"She is that. She'd be worth a nice bit in an English port. Little ships like her run into money."

Captain Bream rang for the *Raglan's* engines to be stopped. The mate took the wheel from Walter, and gently edged the steamer towards the yacht.

"She's had a bit of a bump that's scraped her varnish," remarked Captain Bream, "and her dinghy's missing. I guess she's derelict all right."

A rope ladder was flung over the side, and as the mate neatly steered the *Raglan* alongside, a waiting seaman jumped on to the deck of the yacht and made a rope fast.

"Anyone aboard?" demanded the captain.

"No, sir; deserted."

Captain Bream scrambled nimbly over the rail, had a look through the cabin and forepeak, glanced rapidly over her gear, and then returned aboard the *Raglan*.

"Pity to leave her here, yet we can't tow her into Havre. She's worth five hundred if a penny—matter of a hundred and fifty for salvage if we got her into a British port."

"We can't spare an able seaman to go with her, sir," protested the mate. "We're only two to a watch—and it'd make trouble."

"That's the pity of it, and it's no use sending Derry or any of the others. They're all steamboat hands except old Jack."

Captain Bream looked doleful. He could not be called a mercenary man, but he was loath to lose an opportunity of making a little extra money, whether by means of legitimate shipping commissions, or private trading, or anything else that came his way. Then his eye fell on Walter standing by the wheel.

"Do you think you could find your way with that little craft into Southampton?" he asked.

Walter felt a thrill run through him: here was a chance to show that he was some good.

"I would make a jolly good try, sir, if you give me our position and course," he said.

"We're eighty miles sou'-west of the Needles," replied Captain Bream. "She's got charts aboard and a good binnacle. Get your kit, and tell the cook to make up some grub for you."

Walter quickly gathered his few things from the fo'c'sle, while the cook and steward put a supply of bread, meat, butter, tea and sugar into a bag and passed it over the side.

Captain Bream clambered down again into the yacht, unrolled an English Channel chart, marked off the position and ruled out a course.

"Keep a quarter point east of nor'-east, a bit more rather than less, to pick up the Needles' light. Here's a chart of the Solent. Tides run strong there. Don't try any of these little places," he added, pointing to Lymington and Yarmouth. "Drop your anchor outside if you can't make way against the tide. Give yourself plenty of sea room to get under way again. You've a tidy little capstan for'ard to get the hook

A WAITING SEAMAN JUMPED ON TO THE DECK OF THE YACHT.

up. Give this letter to the Harbour-master at Southampton. You'd better bring up where you see the other yachts lying—no need to go alongside any quay, but don't drop anchor in the fairway."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Walter, noting the instructions carefully.

"Good luck, my lad," concluded the captain. "We shall be in Rouen at least three days—say four from now, so send me a wire, and come across by the Havre boat to rejoin. Here's three pounds for expenses, and you'll get ten for yourself if you make a good job of it."

Of course Cape Horn Jack took an opportunity of stepping aboard the yacht. He ran a critical eye over it, gave a pull or two at the gear, and announced himself satisfied.

Walter lost no time in getting under way. The yacht, which bore the name *Rose* under her counter, had her second jib, roller-foresail, and mainsail, with one reef in it, already set. Giving her a push clear with a long handled mop—he had already learnt how a pointed boat-hook could slip on the smooth metal plates of a steamer—he got his sails to fill, and at once stood away from the *Raglan*.

"Now keep your head, and good luck to you!" shouted Captain Bream.

Walter waved his cap in salute, then quickly trimmed his sheets and brought the *Rose* on her course.

Cape Horn Jack tried to raise a cheer, but it fell rather flat, so he relieved his feelings by addressing the captain. "Beggin' your pardon, sir, she looks a pictur', she do, an' that lad'll make a proper seaman."

"I hope so, my man," answered the captain; then, unbending a little, he added, "I'll be thankful to hear he's got safely into port," and turned briskly to mount the steps to the bridge, whence for some minutes he watched the *Rose* carefully through his binoculars.

Walter, conscious that many eyes were watching him, kept steadily on his course. The wind, north-west, was well abeam, and even under her shortened canvas the *Rose* made good progress. A line dangling over her stern proved to be attached to a small torpedo log. This he presently hauled in, noted the figure on the register, and lowered it again. He found the yacht very easy on her helm. She had evidently a fairly long keel, and, after one or two adjustments of his sheets, he got her into trim, so that it was scarcely necessary to do anything with the helm. Passing a line from the weather coaming of the cockpit round the tiller, he made it fast and watched the result ; then, satisfied that she would keep on her course, he darted into the cabin, and, from a few books in a corner, picked out one of Channel sailing directions and a tide table. He next sorted over his food, and fetched a Primus stove, kettle, cup and plate from the fore-peak, and the yacht's sidelights from their fittings.

For half an hour he sat, handling the tiller whenever it was necessary, and reading up the sailing directions and the list of lights he was likely to sight. Then he prepared the side-lights, which had evidently burned out.

He got the Primus going and made tea, and thought kindly of the doctor, who had included a tin of condensed milk in the stores. The *Raglan* was now out of sight, and there was no sign of other shipping about except some stray wisps of smoke on the horizon ahead, coming, no doubt, from passing steamers.

He felt a trifle lonely, and not a little strung up with the novelty of his position—alone in mid-Channel. Bit by bit he took opportunities of overhauling the yacht's lockers, where he found a generous supply of stores.

When he had made about twenty miles the wind

dropped to an evening calm. Walter noted the time, marked his assumed position on the chart, and began to calculate how much the tide in the Channel was likely to be sweeping him athwart his course. This necessitated a fairly close study of the tide table and chart; and while he was turning over the pages of the former book, he was startled to come upon a small piece of paper that had evidently been used as a book-mark. It was the flap of a fairly tough envelope, and printed on it, in raised black letters, was the name and address of his father's branch of the National and Imperial Bank at Steepleborough.

For a time this drove everything else out of his mind. There could be no mistake about it: some person using that book, presumably on the yacht, had some connection with his father's bank, either as a customer or as a member of the staff. If this was the man who had sailed the yacht into mid-Channel, possibly he was a Steepleborough man—someone, perhaps, known to Walter. But where was he now?—lost at sea, or drifting about in the missing dinghy?

He wondered whether he ought to write home telling his father about it. His first instinct was to do so; but if he did, he would conceivably be drawn into some inquiry that would lead to his having to return home, and give up his plans for making his own way at sea.

He viewed the problem from all points, finally reserving his decision till he reached Southampton, where the yacht had originally belonged, judging from a builder's name that he found on a beam in the cabin.

A loud blast from a steamer's syren roused him from his reflections. He was approaching the steam lane, and one big ocean freighter was coming rather close. Luffing up slightly to give her more room, he continued a long time at the helm, till at last, feeling chilly as the westerly wind once more freshened, he got his oilskin out.

The sun was nearing the horizon, marking a golden path across the sea ; a cloud of pale pink and mauve hung in the lower sky and was reflected in calm patches, while cool blue-grey ripples showed where the breeze was spreading. Overhead, thin wisps of white flecked the deep blue—promises of fine weather and possibly of a sailing breeze.

Walter lit his side-lights and got them in place ; then brewed some coffee from amongst the yacht's stores, and opened a tin of tongue and another of pineapple chunks from the same source, proposing to make a hearty meal to keep him going through the night. Later on he lit the little binnacle lamp to enable him to distinguish the compass dial, and settled down to a long night's trick at the helm.

By midnight he calculated he had covered about thirty-five of the eighty miles to the Needles. At this present rate of progress it would be after mid-day to-morrow before he reached the entrance to the Solent ; and he had some misgivings as to whether he could keep awake and watchful for so long. He found an alarum clock in the cabin, and set this to ring every half-hour to rouse him if he fell asleep.

The half-hours seemed terribly long till 3 a.m., then 3.30 buzzed out it seemed almost directly afterwards, and he realised that he had dozed for almost half an hour. His arm had kept the tiller up, and the yacht was ramping along in a smart breeze, half a point eastward of her proper course. For a moment he felt annoyed with himself ; then he remembered that the extra bit eastward would only counteract some of the tide-drift he had already made to the westward, so there was no harm done. Two more hours passed ; daylight came ; and he estimated that he ought to be within twenty-two or twenty-three miles of the Needles. Another couple of hours should bring land in sight if the shore line were not too hazy.

Again he brewed coffee and got some food ; then he had a wash, and, feeling all the fresher for it, determined, an hour or so later, to strip and swill himself down with a bucket.

About a quarter to eight he definitely saw the gleam of white cliffs ahead. The tide was now making eastward according to his reckoning, and would be stronger near the shore than out in mid-Channel, so he luffed up half a point, and later was able to distinguish a monument on the cliffs, which he gathered from the chart was between Freshwater Bay and the Needles.

At last the Needles showed themselves clearly, and he entered the channel, giving the dangerous point a good margin. He had now to look for an anchorage, since sleep was essential. An examination of the larger-scaled chart led him to choose Totland Bay ; and soon after eleven he let go the anchor, got his canvas in, in a rough and ready way, and, entering the cabin, lay down and instantly fell asleep.

At four o'clock the alarum clock roused him once more, and he sprang up. It was a glorious summer day, and the water of the bay, played on by the south-west breeze, sparkled in the sunlight. He made a good meal, then shook out the reef in the mainsail, got out a number one jib instead of the smaller number two, and prepared to get under way. Setting the mainsail single-handed was a rather difficult job, but he had ample tackle power, and got it done successfully.

Not knowing the trick of setting the jib in stops, he had to put it up and leave the sheets to flog about his legs while he turned the sturdy little capstan and broke his anchor out. He managed it at last, and finally, setting the roller-foresail, ran before the wind towards the narrow gap between Hurst Castle and the Isle of Wight, over-running the last of the ebb or west-going tide.

Off Yarmouth the tide turned in his favour. The Solent Banks were soon reached and passed, then the Lepe buoys; and, keeping an eye on his chart, he picked up the West Bramble and made his way through the Thorn Channel to the Calshot Light-vessel.

Although the yachting season was not in full swing, many craft were dotted about, making for the various little havens on the Hampshire or Island shores. The *Rose* was quite a smart vessel, and Walter felt altogether at home in her. He responded cheerily to a friendly hail from a passing cutter, manned by men of his own class. For a moment he almost forgot how different his position was from theirs, and when it came to him, the recollection brought no bitterness or discontent. It couldn't be helped, and he had no particular wish to change places with them. They were alike, at any rate, in their love of the sea.

He rather wished the trip could have lasted several more days, and it was with a sneaking regret that he realised he was on the last few miles of the run. By ten o'clock he ought to drop anchor off Southampton Pier. Fawley Beacon and Hythe Pier were successively passed, then, following the broader estuary of the Test, Walter picked his way past the great Atlantic liners lying at their moorings, and the pleasure pier, till, sighting a convenient gap amongst other yachts, he rounded up and once more let go his anchor.

It was now dark. He changed his side-lights for a bright anchor light, and, as it was useless to attempt to catch that night's steamer, he turned in without communicating with the shore. Rocked gently by the slight ripple on the water, he slept soundly till eight o'clock the following morning, and would probably have remained asleep longer had not a prowling waterman, looking for odd jobs, come alongside and given him a hail.

"Morning, sir; d'you want any water fetched, or a boat to put you ashore?"

"Thanks," replied Walter; "come for me at ten o'clock."

CHAPTER THE NINTH

BACK TO THE "RAGLAN"

IT was a mildly astonished Harbour-master who read Captain Bream's short note and then looked at Walter Buckland. He belonged to the old deep-water school—now all too rare; hence his remark: "Well, I'd never have believed a steamboat hand could have done it—brought the *Rose* in a matter of a hundred odd miles single-handed. You can call yourself a fore-and-aft sailor-man anyhow."

"I've been very lucky," explained Walter modestly; "absolutely a fair wind all the way. She just blew here."

"Ay, well, it's her home port, and Rogers will be glad to see her back, even though your captain has labelled her for salvage."

"Have you any idea who went out with her?" asked Walter. "I'm wondering if the man was drowned."

"Rogers'll tell us that. You'd better come round to his office with me. You'll have to sign a statement or two, and then I'll fix up for you to get back to Rouen and rejoin your ship."

Walter despatched a wire to Captain Bream to say that he had arrived safely with the yacht, and was crossing by that night's boat. Captain Bream received it about mid-day, when he was discussing some ship's business with the mate. He smacked his thigh, and

exclaimed, "Bravo! He's done it, Mister. I'll sign that youngster on as ordinary seaman next trip. In fact, I'd make him an A.B. if he'd more sea time in."

Mr. Rogers was naturally greatly concerned about the strange disappearance of the man who had chartered the *Rose* and set out in her alone.

"His name was Hill—a stranger to me; a Londoner, I think. Anyhow, his address is"—he turned up a ledger to verify it—"220 Loampit Road, Lewisham. He first chartered her at Easter, then at Whitsun he booked her for a month, with the option of extending the term. He said he wanted to visit Devon and Cornwall."

"Does he owe you anything?" asked the Harbour-master.

"No; he sent some money from Salcombe—pound notes in a registered envelope—only last week; and the salvage and missing dinghy don't worry me as she's fully insured in every way. That's the insurance company's pidgin."

In parting, Mr. Rogers shook hands with Walter, and pressed a piece of paper into his palm. Walter glanced at it and saw that it was a five-pound note.

"Oh, really, you oughtn't to give me this," he protested. "Captain Bream will pay me for bringing the yacht in. He promised me ten pounds."

"And you've earned it. Don't worry about that fiver: we'll charge it to the insurance!"

The Harbour-master next saw to getting Walter his papers to permit him to travel in France. The news of his having brought the *Rose* in quickly spread, and even secured a paragraph in the local evening paper, where he was relieved to find his name recorded as "Walters." He booked a second-class ticket to Rouen, and, going early aboard the boat, had a nap until the noise of other passengers coming aboard about half-past eleven roused him. Then he had supper, watched

the easy way in which the turbine steamer got under way, and, when well out in Southampton Water, turned in once more on his sofa berth.

Six o'clock next morning found the boat entering Havre. After going through the usual formalities on landing, he took a tram ride across the city, got a light breakfast of coffee and rolls, and left by the Paris express for Rouen.

Much to his surprise, Captain Bream was awaiting him when he alighted at the end of the journey. He hardly imagined that the dignity of a master mariner would permit him to unbend so far to a mere ship's boy; but the captain was anxious to hear Walter's report uninterrupted, and without the restraint which the difference between their respective stations would have imposed on board.

Walter told him about his discovery of the envelope flap and of the worry it was causing him.

"That's nothing," commented the captain. "He might have had a letter from the Steepleborough bank, or he might have picked up the scrap of paper somewhere and used it as a book-mark. Seeing Mr. Rogers has got his name and address, they won't have any difficulty in finding out his friends and relations."

Walter was only too ready to accept the captain's optimistic view of the affair; the more so that his conscience had been troubling him over his omission to write home about it.

His reception in the *Raglan's* fo'c'sle was characteristic of seamen. All hands recognised the merit of his achievement, yet, with the customary reserve of Britons, whether at a public school or in a ship's fo'c'sle, they did not rush to hand out bouquets.

"Got on all right, Coppernob?"

"Yes, thanks. Fair wind all the way. No trouble."

"Easy sort of trip, like?" observed Cape Horn Jack.

"Yes, I suppose it was, though I got jolly sleepy before it was over."

"You would," broke in Derry. "You ain't trained to the sea yet."

"You've no call to shout, Derry," snapped old Jack. "They'd ha' picked you up dead half-way round t'other side of Ireland."

"Ho, would they! I can steer as steady a course as that kid."

"Yes, but you wouldn't have had savvy enough to know if your course was right or wrong. That means a bit o' navigation as well as fore-and-aft seamanship. Coppernob 'ere's got eddication, an' can read sailing directions and a chart, whereas you'd be beat to tell sea from shore. I know you: you can steer steady so long as someone is leaning over you."

"Go on, Coppernob; spin us your yarn," said Ginger, leaning back and lighting his pipe.

"I'm afraid there isn't much yarn. I found she'd lay her course by trimming her sheets and lashing the tiller a trifle up, so I got some grub and put in a spell of sleep."

A roar of laughter interrupted him, and a seaman, not in Walter's watch, exclaimed, "He'll soon be as big a liar as Cape Horn Jack. Go on, young 'un; try another."

Old Jack glared at the speaker indignantly. "How many more times am I to waste my breath telling you chaps you're not seamen—only steamboat deckhands? You're a well-meaning lot, an' do your jobs as long as you've someone over you; but Lord help you if ever you get adrift in a ship's boat an' no officer to tell you where to strike the mud. In course he made her sail herself. If she had a good long keel, and her canvas was properly balanced, she'd do it in a steady wind. Why, I've steered a four-masted thousand-ton ship with one finger many a trick."

"And then you woke up," jeered the other.

"No," said History Dick; "Coppernob woke up. What did you do next?"

"I kept her on her course till I picked up the land. Of course I was lucky. I sighted a mark easy to recognise on the chart; then I headed for the Needles and dropped anchor in Totland Bay. Got up to Southampton with the evening tide."

It needs but a small matter to commence a long argument in a ship's fo'c'sle, and the question whether a yacht would steer a course with her helm lashed lasted the *Raglan's* crew all the way home. The men who were used only to a steamer's helm were dubious, having got thoroughly used to the constant necessity of having to counteract the influence of a propeller, which causes a steamer to bear away; but Cape Horn Jack said that he had once met a man in the States who had taken a small craft round the world single-handed, and had let her steer herself most of the way.

From Rouen they ran back light to Swansea. On the way over, the captain informed all hands that he had orders to pay off the crew, who had signed on for trading between British ports and the Continent between Brest and the German Elbe, and re-sign for North American trade.

"I didn't know we were doing that much coal carrying to the States," remarked a seaman as they talked the prospect over. "I shan't sign on. I like home trade, and a chance to see my missus and kids." Cape Horn Jack announced his intention of signing on; so did History Dick. When they were nearing the Mumbles the bo'sun said to Walter, "Cap'n Bream'll sign you on as a proper O.S. if you come the next trip." Walter jumped at the chance.

He found little opportunity for getting ashore at Swansea. The ship had to be dry-docked and cleaned, and there was painting to be done. The spare cabin he

had helped the bo'sun to clear at Lydney, when he first came aboard, was now turned into a wireless room.

Of course, old Jack had his views on that subject. "They'll get sich a deck-load o' fancy gadgets soon that they'll be able to send farmers to sea, an' when they lose their way they'll just give 'em a shout by wireless tallygraph an' tell 'em what to do. 'Tain't the same as real sea-going."

CHAPTER THE TENTH

THE BROAD ATLANTIC

WHEN the *Raglan* left Swansea, resplendent in new paint, several changes had been made in her personnel. The first mate and bo'sun remained, so also did the chief engineer; but the second mate had given place to a man with a "deep-water" ticket, and a third was signed on. The engine-room staff was increased by a second and third engineer and a donkey-man; and a smart-looking lad, answering to the nickname of "Sparks," had been shipped to look after the wireless apparatus.

Derry, after protesting till the last moment that he would not do so, had signed on: he knew that he was not likely to obtain a snugger berth. The new hands for'ard were all used to long voyages. One was a Nova Scotia man—in common parlance, a "blue-nose"—who had done two seasons in the Newfoundland Banks fishing schooners.

"Nigh as good as being a real sailor-man," commented Cape Horn Jack, to which a retort was promptly forthcoming:

"Why, you old lime-juicer, you don't know what real sea is till you try to beat back to Boston in a

ninety-foot schooner with a howlin' nor'-wester ag'in you. Cape Horn's a pleasure trip to it ; " and for once old Jack had to admit that that was real seamanship.

" I haven't tried any of your fancy schooner work," he said, " and you've never smelled the Horn, so we'll let it go at that."

The *Raglan* was bound in ballast for a port in the Mull of Kintyre, and on arrival there she loaded a large number of small cases. These were immediately recognised to contain whisky, and a brisk discussion took place amongst the hands over the question of whether they were engaged on a legitimate trading voyage or on a smuggling expedition to the United States. And, in the latter case, the further question arose of what extra money they would be likely to pick up.

The captain did not think fit to satisfy curiosity on these points, but the news gradually filtered through to the fo'c'sle, via the usual channel of the captain's steward and the doctor, that they were not going to undertake anything that would bring them into conflict with the American Revenue authorities.

From this port they ran on to Greenock, and filled up with a general cargo of " Paisley goods " for Halifax. With her bunkers, which had been extended, fully loaded with steam coal, the *Raglan* at last set out on her trip across the Atlantic. Running to the north of Ireland she took her departure, and was soon out on the open ocean.

To Walter Buckland the beginning of this, his first long voyage, was all novelty and excitement. The short runs he had so far made were too much broken up with entering and leaving port to enable the crew to settle down to proper watch-and-watch-about work. Averaging two hundred and forty miles per day, it was estimated that they would be at least ten days from land to land, possibly fourteen days from port

to port—ample time for the ship to fall into a steady routine.

Although the *Raglan* had been thoroughly overhauled at Swansea, the first mate found plenty for the new crew to do in keeping her spick and span, and Walter was kept busily employed—which was a good thing for him as well as for the ship, since nothing causes more trouble amongst the hands on a long trip than too much leisure during their watch on deck. It is much worse in its effects than calls for extra work during their watch below. The men will naturally grouse at having to lose part of their rest, but that is a thing that officers in the mercantile marine are well qualified to cope with, and it does nobody any particular harm.

Walter now shared brass-cleaning and similar jobs with Derry, and also stood a trick at the wheel. He found the Nova Scotia man, Blewitt—or, as he was more often called, " Bluey "—a very intelligent fellow, with some practical, though elementary, knowledge of navigation.

Captain Bream considered him a useful man to have aboard owing to his experience on the Fishing Banks. The *Raglan* was following what is known as a composite course—one which, although on a chart it looks longer than a straight line from point to point, is really shorter because it takes advantage of the curve of the earth. Great circle sailing, as this is called, would, if carried to the extreme limit, have taken them too far north for safety in view of the summer movement of ice from the polar regions. Bluey had had something to do with ice and knew the signs of its proximity, and he could be relied upon for look-out work at night or in fog.

Cape Horn Jack had seen ice in the Antarctic, but under totally different conditions. There, strong wind, rain, and snow are its usual accompaniments—things

bad enough in themselves, but not so trying to the nerves as the thick fogs that prevail on the Banks.

Three days out, in latitude 54° 50′ North and about 21° West longitude, the glass began to drop rapidly—a certain warning of approaching bad weather ; and a little later they ran into it. A circular storm or cyclonic depression, following the course of the Gulf Stream, was encountered, and Captain Bream, not knowing how severe it might be, took every possible precaution. Hatchways were carefully examined, and extra lashings put on the derricks ; the boats on their chocks, though securely held, had additional ropes served round them ; and every movable object was made fast.

Walter had been called to take the wheel while this work was in progress so that the older and stronger men might be free. Long before it was through the ship ran into the heavy ocean swell on the edge of the storm, and seas like a succession of grey-green hill-sides bore down upon her.

She rose buoyantly to each one, though her bow to the fo'c'sle head was often buried almost level with the water ; and at the crest she would break her way through, sending a heavy cascade across the fo'c'sle to the well-deck. Handling the wheel did not impose a much greater physical strain on the helmsman, since the steam steering-gear did the actual work of moving the rudder ; but the heavy motion made it more difficult for him to keep the ship on her course. And, as the wind rose, catching her on her port bow, she tended constantly to fall off, especially on the crest of a sea, when, for a moment, the rudder had less grip.

Captain Bream, meanwhile, stood by, and Walter was surprised to discover a new side to his character. For him, the *Raglan* was not merely a mass of steel and machinery, but a real living thing. Above the noise of the wind and sea his voice could be heard

talking to her—encouraging her to do her best. "Go it, old girl. . . . That's the way to do it. . . . We'll show 'em. . . . Up with you, my lass. . . . Up she goes. . . . You're a little beauty, my lady!" Then, as she shipped a sea awkwardly, his tone changed. "Ugh, you clumsy old brute, kick your head up!" But for the most part the admonitions were in the more tender strain.

Walter was three hours at the wheel before he was relieved—he began to wonder if he would have to do the whole watch; then History Dick took over. "Stay on the bridge, my lad," said the Captain, "in case I want you. Stand to loo'ard, and keep your eyes skinned."

They were in the stream where derelicts or masses of wreckage, drifting across the Atlantic from almost any point north of the Gulf of Mexico, were most likely to be in their way; and, as old Jack afterwards explained, "You generally find such like in bad weather or on a dark night."

Nothing out of the ordinary happened during the remainder of the watch, but the sight of the great moving hills of water, criss-crossed with smaller waves, which broke into spume and drove down on the ship, fascinated Walter, who was scarcely conscious of the cold as he snuggled up close to the canvas dodger and kept a keen look-out.

During supper, eaten under rather more disagreeable conditions than usual, conversation in the fo'c'sle ran on the subject of the severity or otherwise of the storm. Bluey commenced it by remarking to old Jack, "Good sailing breeze this, Cape Horner."

"Ay, ay, passable to tidy. Any decent ship'd make a fair passage of it with double-reefed topsails."

"What! Double-reef! What'd you do if it blew hard?"

"Oh, ay; I know your sort. Crowd it on her—

what she can't carry she must drag ; but that don't make for a good passage. Any fool can hang on too long, an' if nothing gives way they call him a driver ; but he ain't."

" If it's blowing no worse than this on the Banks every schooner there won't have no more'n double-reefed mainsails," laughed Blewitt.

" Maybe so, an' maybe memorial services are popular like among your chapel folk."

" Guess you want to try the Cape Codders for that," replied Blewitt. " Mighty tough citizens, those Yanks."

" Ay, so they be, an' mighty tough with their tongues. I mind one chap as got mad with me, an' asked if I'd forgotten Bunker's Hill, or some such name. 'Never shipped in her,' says I ; 'you're talking to the wrong man.' "

" Old 'un, you're the limit," yelled History Dick. " Bunker's Hill was where the Yanks licked the British after that there tea-party row at Boston."

" Licked the British, did they ? " growled old Jack, and turned for confirmation to Walter, who simply nodded. " Well, go on—spin your bloomin' yarn. I'll buy it. Who was Bunker ? "

During the laugh that followed, Blewitt smacked the old seaman on the shoulder. " Jack, old sport," he exclaimed, " you work that one off on a Yankee, and I'll stand you a whole bottle of real prohibition whisky."

As he lay that night trying to sleep, Walter felt as though he were on the end of a huge see-saw. Each time the *Raglan* plunged down the slope of a great sea it seemed as if the bottom was falling out of his bunk ; but he grew accustomed to it after a time, and slept more than he would have thought possible.

When he was called for the dreaded middle watch he put on all the warm clothing he could conveniently

carry, and, acting on a tip from old Jack, made his oilskin snug with a piece of thin rope round his waist.

"A body-and-soul lashing, my lad; keeps you feeling dry like, an' not so hampered up with your gear."

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

DIRTY WEATHER

OLD JACK went to the helm, and, as the fo'c'sle head was being swept by heavy seas too frequently for a look-out to be of any use there, History Dick did that duty from the bridge. Walter was simply told to stand by, and he took shelter in the alley-way, where the bo'sun also was endeavouring to have a quiet pipe.

"Well, my lad," he remarked, unbending a little from his usual attitude of dignified aloofness, "you're having a taste of real sea, and I hopes you like it."

"I'm all right, thanks," Walter replied; "but I was a bit nervy at first. I was at the wheel, and we seemed to strike it all of a sudden."

"That's as it might seem like to you," said the bo'sun, who prided himself on his knowledge of weather conditions. "You see, these here gales are sort of worn-out cyclones. They come along at a tidy rate, an' likewise don't forget we're running towards it at a good ten knots. It might not have seemed to hit us so sudden if so be we'd been bound eastward."

"Then I suppose we run through it, and come out into fine weather on the other side?" asked Walter.

"So we do, unless there's another of 'em close on the heels of this one. Wind's westing, so it's half over. I reckon it'll go nor'west, then clear."

"I hope so," said Walter, and then his voice was drowned by the heavy crash of a sea, followed by the roar of water pouring into the well-deck. "After all, this isn't exactly comfortable."

"May be a sight worse before long. A change of the wind may knock up a nasty sea—it always seems to blow a bit harder then."

They stood silent for a time, and then a shrill whistle sounded from the bridge.

"Up you go my lad," said the bo'sun; "they've got a job for us."

"Make fast that cover," yelled the mate, pointing to the foremost lifeboat on the starboard side where the canvas was beginning to flap loose. An eyelet had broken and caused the edge to lift. It seemed a trifling matter, but at such a time nothing must be left to chance. "Keep a vessel ship-shape and she'll weather anything," was the working motto of Captain Bream.

It was hard work, keeping one's balance on the reeling bridge deck. The wind had gone into the north-west, as the bo'sun had prophesied, and while the main run of the sea was still from the south-west, the ugly broken heads of cross-seas were becoming more and more noticeable.

The *Raglan* plunged down the side of a hill of water, then awkwardly lifted her nose to another, which struck her starboard bow and half-filled the well-deck, sending blinding showers of heavy spray over Walter and the bo'sun. Then the ship plunged again, rolling heavily to starboard. A grey-green mass of angry water rose as high as the bridge itself, broke across the rail, splintered the lifeboat and tore it from its chocks, flinging the broken timbers against the side of the fiddley; and man and boy were swept from their foothold, away in a swirling torrent.

As Walter felt himself going his hands instinctively grasped for something to cling to. His right found a

MAN AND BOY WERE SWEPT FROM THEIR FOOTHOLD, AWAY IN A SWIRLING TORRENT.

rail along the edge of the fiddley; with his left he grabbed something firm but yielding, which proved to be the bo'sun's oilskin. For a moment that seemed like an age his arms were extended to the full, and wrenched as though his shoulders were being pulled from their sockets on a rack; then something struck him on the head, and he lost consciousness.

He awoke, how long afterwards he did not know, to hear the bo'sun's voice coming, as it seemed, from across an immense distance.

"All right now, my lad; slack away."

Dazed, he loosened his grip on the oilskin, but still clung to the rail. The mate came from the bridge and gripped him.

"Are you much hurt?"

"I don't think so, sir," answered Walter. "Something hit me."

"A lump of the lifeboat. Get him for'ard, bo'sun, and tie his head up—it's bleeding."

Dodging between the seas, the bo'sun assisted Walter to the fo'c'sle door, and called to the watch below to help him in.

"All right, I can manage," cried Walter; but the fo'c'sle seemed to be spinning round, and he was not sorry to be helped into his bunk.

"'Tain't fit weather for a kid like him to be on deck," said Derry sourly, as he dived into Walter's kit-bag and dragged out a handkerchief and a scarf.

"I'm thanking heaven it were him an' not you," replied the bo'sun. "I'd have been swept clean over if it hadn't been for him clinging to my coat. Saved me, he did, anyhow, so you shut your mouth."

One of the crowd laughed. "Derry's tongue is slung amidships and wags both ends at once, boss."

"Ay, well, one of you look after that lad and make him comfortable. T'other two of you come with me and clear up the mess on deck."

To give Derry his due, he was quite ready to jump out and do his share on deck, but the two A.B.'s pushed him back, and told him to stay there "and make Coppernob easy."

Derry helped Walter to get clear of his wet clothes. "You do seem to have all the bloomin' luck," he remarked resentfully. "I've been at sea two years, an' they reckon everything I do's wrong. You haven't been two months, and they're talkin' like givin' you medals."

"Oh, I reckon you're all right really," said Walter as Derry, with clumsy fingers, fumbled with a sodden buttonhole.

"I dun'no. I seem to rub chaps up the wrong way."

Before the other men returned Walter and Derry had come to understand each other a little better; and though his head still throbbed and ached, Walter began to feel some small degree of comfort. Captain Bream took the first opportunity of leaving the bridge to come for'ard with bandages, lint, and a bottle of dark antiseptic liquid.

"It will make you jump for a bit, my lad," he said pleasantly; "but perhaps it will save you a lot of trouble later."

He bathed the wound, which he found to be more of a deep graze than a cut; then gently applied the antiseptic. Whether it was old-fashioned friar's balsam or a solution of iodine, Walter did not trouble to inquire. It smarted and burned for some minutes like a hot iron. He screwed up his face and gasped—in fact, he felt like yelling; then the captain put some cooling ointment on lint, and bandaged his head in a workmanlike manner.

"Stay in your bunk to-day," he said firmly, "and get some sleep. We'll see what you are like to-morrow."

With rough good-nature, the other men did what-

ever they could to make the boy comfortable. The cook sent him in some " cabin grub," including a huge basin of good pea soup, which old Jack sniffed with approval.

" Now that's proper sort o' soup," he observed, " what you can stand your spoon up in. None o' your dish-washings and tater peelings."

The wind took off during the day, and everybody became more cheerful in spite of a thin drizzle of rain, which set in as the wind dropped. During the second dog-watch old Jack, Dick, and Blewitt sat at ease, smoking and yarning.

" I reckon after we get clear of this drizzle an' make the Banks we'll find fog," announced old Jack.

Blewitt nodded in agreement, and added, " Likely as not, an' we don't want it with the ice working to the south'ard."

" Bit early for it, isn't it ? " asked History Dick.

" No, not if it's been an open spring in the north."

" I've no manner of use for ice," growled old Jack ; " likewise not for fog neither."

" That's so," assented Blewitt, " an' when you get the two together there's the devil to pay an' no pitch hot."

" I haven't met any yet away," said Dick ; " must look blinkin' 'orrid—a big white berg right acrost your bow."

" They don't always look white," put in old Jack. " Fog often makes 'em black."

Blewitt rubbed a bit of cake between his hands ready to load his pipe, and struck into a vein of reminiscence.

" I remember once seeing a floe in broad daylight that was all shiny black, an' when we came near it there was a terrible splashing, an' it turned white. It had been covered with seals—black all over with 'em."

History Dick stared doubtfully at the narrator,

and Walter raised himself on his elbow to hear what old Jack would have to say in reply. The old man was not to be outdone.

"Maybe that's so. I don't say as how it couldn't be. I minds being in the South Seas one voyage, an' we ran close alongside a bit of an island that was red all over with lobsters."

"Aw, chuck it, Jack; you make me tired," exclaimed Dick. "Talk sense or shut up. Lobsters is black afore they're boiled, ain't they, Coppernob?"

"English lobsters are," agreed Walter, forgetting for a moment the pain of his bandaged head; "but, of course, Jack may have seen another breed."

"No," replied the old man, disdaining any such get-out. "No, they were proper black lobsters when they climbed out of the sea, but they turned red when they got on the island, 'cause it was all awash with them boiling springs what volcanoes make."

A howl of derision went up. Blewitt clapped old Jack on the shoulder so heartily that he caused him to bite an inch off his short clay pipe.

"Go easy, you," exclaimed Jack, ejecting the fragment of clay. "I don't mind shaping a pipe up a bit, but my teeth ain't what they were forty year ago."

"Coming back to what I was saying," remarked Blewitt, "I guess the Old Man's setting rather a northerly course, being bound for Halifax, and he's liable to pick up ice anything up to three hundred mile this side of the Banks."

"Ay, it's an awkward sort o' passage at the best," said old Jack; "an' when he finds your bloomin' Banks he's got to keep clear of Cape Race to the nor'ard, the Virgins to port, an' likewise not hit Sable Island afore he makes up for Halifax."

"Huh, the old Atlantic's big enough," grunted Dick. "He ought to have sea-room enough to miss them places."

"That's as may be, my lad," replied old Jack in a tone of patient reproof, "but when you've got fog to deal with same as this 'ere Gulf Stream keeps brewin' up, them places has a funny knack o' gettin' right across your bow—same as ice. It was through getting a proper sickener of ice last time I sailed out o' Liverpool for Melbourne what made me chuck going to sea."

Blewitt grinned, then exclaimed, "Chucked going to sea, have you; then what are you doing now?"

"Steamboating!" shouted old Jack, getting up and leaving the fo'c'sle.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

ICE

WALTER was able to get about next day. His head still pained him when he stooped, and, since it was his turn to act "Peggy," he was grateful to History Dick, who volunteered to do this job while Walter took his place on look-out. Derry was told off to scrub out the mate's cabin, and, as usual, made a song about it; but Walter had now learned that Derry's growls were no more than a safety valve for letting off steam.

"I'll take a turn for you one day," said Walter; but the only reply he got was, "Aw, shut up!"

From the fo'c'sle head the sea looked grey and cold. Already the mists which are the normal state of the atmosphere in this region were beginning to be noticeable; the water merged into the sky without a clear-cut horizon, and visibility was limited to something under two miles. It was a grey day. The officers on the bridge waited anxiously for a chance of "shooting

the sun," but there was too much cloud to permit an observation being taken.

The following morning the weather was distinctly foggier. Banks of mist appeared ahead, through which the *Raglan* thrust her nose as through a curtain, to come out presently into a clearer space beyond ; and this occurred with increasing frequency as the voyage progressed.

About mid-day the sun could be dimly discerned, but as the afternoon wore on it disappeared again, and the fog grew yet more dense. Now that he was approaching an area where, in all probability, ice would be met with, Captain Bream took additional measures to ensure the safety of the ship. The temperature of the sea was taken every hour throughout the day till sunset, then every half-hour ; the syren was regularly sounded, and every ear was strained to catch a possible echo, which might be an indication of ice near at hand, the sound being thrown back from a berg. The look-out man was warned to announce the merest variation in the density of the mist, in case it should be the shadow of an iceberg ; for, as the captain put it, " Better sing out a hundred times for nothing than not sing out just that once when you ought."

It fell to Walter to be look-out man from ten till midnight, and he felt his responsibility keenly, for there had been a decided drop in the thermometer with which the temperature of the sea was tested.

" Keep an extra special eye to wind'ard," advised Blewitt. " The cold water extends furthest on the lee side of a berg, and this wind nor'-nor'-west will be bringing 'em down on us."

Peering ahead into the gloom, Walter strained his eyes to distinguish the slightest variation that might show in the uniformly leaden wall of fog. Once he thought he detected a flash of white, and instantly he hailed the bridge. Though the engines were im-

mediately rung to " Stop," the ship continued to bear down on the object, which proved to be the remains of a ship's boat, probably lost overboard from a vessel in the recent gale.

About six bells Blewitt came to the fo'c'sle head with instructions to relieve Walter, who was told off to get coffee for the captain and mate, both of whom were on the bridge. Glad of a chance of getting a hot drink himself, and possibly one for old Jack, who was standing his trick at the wheel, Walter made a big enamelled jugful in record time ; and after the captain and mate had emptied their mugs, he got the welcome order : " Relieve the helmsman while he has a drink."

Standing there intent on his duty, wrapped round by the impenetrable veil of fog—into which the ship slowly advanced, and out of which disaster, silent and overwhelming, might even now be advancing stealthily upon her—there floated uppermost into Walter's mind, all unbidden, the recollection of evenings spent in his snug study at Malmeswick. A whole lifetime away it seemed. Some of the fellows would no doubt envy his present lot, and, after all, taking the wheel of a steamer in mid-Atlantic amounted to something, and——

" Ice ahead! Ice on starboard bow! "

Blewitt's voice rang out like a bugle-call.

" Hard a starboard, lively! " came the crisp order from Captain Bream, and simultaneously the engine-room bell rang " Stop," then " Full astern."

" Big berg to starboard," cried Blewitt.

There was a commotion for'ard as the watch below ran out of the fo'c'sle. They had no wish to be caught like rats in a trap in a mass of twisted beams and plates should the ship hit the berg head on.

As way was stopped by the reversed engines, Captain Bream whistled down the speaking-tube to

the engine-room for a turn ahead. " Dead slow—just let 'em turn over, that's all."

The shadowy outline of a massive iceberg could now be distinguished, and the *Raglan* crept slowly by.

" See anything ahead, look-out ? "

" No, sir ; we're past that one."

Walter had spun the wheel round the instant the order was given ; then old Jack took it, thrusting his empty coffee mug into Walter's hand, who threw both jug and mugs into a corner and stood by for orders.

" Bring her up to her course," said Captain Bream, ringing for half-speed ; and with a gentle swish of water as the propeller revolved more quickly, the ship gathered way through the calm fog-covered sea, disturbed only by the small swells in her wake.

" All clear now, I hope," said the mate with a dry laugh. " That one was too close to be pleasant."

A few minutes passed, then the stillness of the night was broken by a great crashing and rending sound somewhere just astern. A big sea, followed quickly by smaller ones, raised the steamer and shook her. The crashing continued for a time, and heavy splashes were heard ; then the noises receded and ultimately died away.

" By Jove, Mister, our luck's in. If that fellow had turned turtle a bit closer we should have been posted at Lloyd's ; " and with a shiver Captain Bream swung his arms violently across his chest to warm himself, and stamped up and down the bridge.

Eight bells were sounded and the watch was changed, though the captain remained on deck when the second mate came on duty.

" Well, I've heard tell of icebergs capsizing, but that's the first one I've ever been near," observed History Dick.

" Likewise I don't mind if it's the last," added old Jack, lighting his pipe before turning in.

"What makes it capsize?" asked Walter. "I always thought an iceberg was much bigger in the water than it was out."

"So it may be," replied Blewitt, "so far as weight goes, but it ain't always so deep in the water as it is high out of it, an' sometimes what's above is tall and narrow like. Then in cold weather the top doesn't melt much, but what is in the water, when it finds its way into the Gulf Stream, melts mighty fast, till the moment comes when it can't carry the top-hamper, and the first bit of a swell to give it a heel turns it over. Maybe it was just the wash of our ship capsized that one."

During the early hours of the morning the wind went round through the north with a rising glass, and came strong enough from the eastward to move the fog. As the day wore on it settled into a steady south-easterly breeze, and they carried fine weather with them till well inside Sable Island, making for Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Since leaving Greenock little had been said amongst the crew about the object of the voyage, but now, with the first port of call so close at hand, interest in the matter revived. Speculation became rife, and centred mainly, of course, in that part of the cargo that was destined for the United States—how and where it would be landed, and what the results of the venture were likely to be. If, as Captian Bream had declared at the outset, he did not intend to do anything that would bring him into conflict with the American Revenue, it was concluded that the cases of whisky would be transferred to another vessel at sea, since the prohibition law forbade their being landed at any United States port under heavy penalty.

No one aboard had had any previous experience of this sort of work, though everyone, it appeared, knew somebody else who had; and at any rate, lack

of precise knowledge of the subject was no hindrance to a full discussion in the fo'c'sle of the ingenuity of boot-leggers, and of the means adopted by the Revenue officers for out-witting them. Feeling at times ran high between those who regarded the business as one of legitimate trade and those who took the view that it was smuggling pure and simple, the consequences of which might be extremely unpleasant.

Of them all, old Jack seemed to be the least perturbed. "Do your job and obey orders," said he. "'Tain't your worry. You can lay your life Captain Bream knows how far it is safe to go. He doesn't fancy the job any more'n you an' me, an' he'll take no risks with his ship or his ticket. I've been with him in sail, and there ain't much left to teach him about the sea."

"It'll be a thunderin' ork'ard job unloading cases in the open if there's any sea on," growled one man.

"Well, what about it?" demanded old Jack. "You're goin' to get a bonus out of it, ain't yer?"

Which was an aspect of the matter upon which all hands were united, to the extent at least that they hoped so.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

MR. PETERS "SAYS HIS PIECE"

THEY reached Halifax in brilliant sunshine, having left the last fog bank a few miles out of harbour. Blewitt expressed the opinion that they had been lucky to see so little of it, for it was no uncommon thing for a ship to be in a dense fog all the way across the Banks.

"I should say we had about enough of it," laughed

Walter ; to which the Nova Scotia man replied, " Ay ; an' likely you'll be praying for it if we get into any trouble round about Rum Row."

" Where is that exactly ? "

" It isn't exactly anywhere. The name applies to places where ships with cargoes such as ours hang about just outside the legal boundary off the U.S.A. coast, mostly towards New York. I expect Captain Bream has got the tip where to go, or he'll get it here in Halifax."

Blewitt, as it turned out, had made a very good guess. Halifax was the base for many operations of the same sort ; and as soon as the *Raglan* was in port a well-dressed man came aboard and was shut up with the captain for some time. Walter was on the bridge polishing brasswork when he left, and could not help overhearing one or two of his parting injunctions to Captain Bream, given with the air of one whose word was law.

" Well, whip that bit of stuff out of her double quick. Fill up with coal ; and I'll send the launch alongside first thing in the morning. Those davits will carry it fine."

There was some little growling amongst the hands at no shore leave being allowed, but not so much as there would probably have been under more ordinary circumstances. As it was, the excitement and pervading sense of something unusual impending kept the discontent within bounds.

The general cargo of Paisley goods was flung ashore at top speed ; bunkers were filled ; and, in place of the lifeboat wrecked during the gale on the way over, a smoke-grey launch was swung into place—a boat with a high bow, fine lines, and a business-like motor amidships. When they left the following evening, the man who had previously come aboard accompanied them as passenger.

The fo'c'sle discussed him pretty thoroughly, but could not quite place him.

"Doctor says his name's Peters, an' the Old Man puts a handle to it when he speaks to him—calls him 'Mister' all right and proper," said History Dick. "Is he one of your local blokes, Blucy?"

Blewitt shook his head. "Couldn't say for certain. Name's common enough if it's his own, but he doesn't talk Nova Scotia."

"He's a wide 'un," remarked old Jack. "I've met such. They knock about the world till you can't tell where they belong to. Struck me he was a Yank."

Whatever he was, he certainly had ideas of his own concerning the way in which the present affair was to be managed, and the following morning he took the opportunity of expressing them, politely but forcefully, to Captain Bream in the latter's cabin.

"You'll have to take your crew more into your confidence, Captain. They're bound to know a few things, and they'll imagine a dickens of a lot more—mostly wrong. Tell them that, though the job's unusual, there's nothing illegal in it. So long as we are outside the twelve-mile line we can do what we like with the cargo. Uncle Sam's law doesn't run beyond that, and if your folk hadn't been so easy-going, the old three-mile limit would still have held good. We aren't the smugglers, bootleggers, or whatever fancy kind of law-breakers you label us. We sell them the stuff openly, and the whole U.S. Navy has no right to interfere."

"I've no wish to interview the U.S. Navy," replied Captain Bream, sourly. "We're accessories before the fact, however you may argue."

"That doesn't hold good in boot-legging law outside the limit. They might get you if you drifted in, but it's up to you to keep just outside. Your chief worry isn't the Navy, but the tough gangs of thieves—

pirates they are, absolutely—who wouldn't hesitate to seize this ship and the cargo, then set you to drift helplessly inshore, with enough stuff left aboard to make you a catch for the Revenue men."

Captain Bream rose angrily from his seat. "I'd like to see the crowd of ruffians that'd take my ship from me! I'd—I'd——"

"You'd shoot 'em down like dogs. I know; and for safety's sake I've brought a chest of arms aboard —good automatics, and enough ammunition to make a fair show. It's in the steward's pantry, marked 'groceries.'"

"You've taken a confounded liberty, sir," snapped Captain Bream. "You'd no right to ship arms aboard the *Raglan* without my express permission."

The two men looked each other squarely in the face, but neither flinched nor showed any intention of giving way. Then Peters lit a cigar, biting off the end with his teeth.

"Say, it's no good making a breeze about that. Overhaul your sailing orders, and you'll find that I've absolute charge where the cargo is concerned; and I guess we'll call that grocery box 'cargo' anyway."

"You've full powers over the cargo," retorted Captain Bream, "but I'm responsible for the safety of the ship and all hands. You're simply a glorified supercargo, and there are limits beyond which I won't go in carrying out your instructions."

Peters broke into a laugh. "Say, Captain, I don't want to hurt your feelings, and I never did worry about titles. Call me clerk, cabin-boy, or ship's dog if it pleases you; but for heaven's sake remember that I know this game from A to Z, and if we pull together we'll make a pleasant trip of it."

This had the effect of partly soothing the captain's ruffled feelings. "All right," he said. "I'll call all hands at eight bells this afternoon, and you can say

your piece. It will prevent my saying too much or too little ; but, mark ye, don't shout too loud about those revolvers."

Peters did not conceal his satisfaction at this concession. "By the way," he observed casually, "I've another little favour to ask. I want a smart hand to learn to run that gasoline outfit. It's only a one-man job."

Captain Bream thought for a moment. "The second engineer's keen on motors, but it isn't his work to run that boat."

"Engineers be hanged," exclaimed Peters ; "it's a kid's job. My fourteen-year-old cub'd run her back to Halifax without batting an eyelid. Who's that lad doing spit-and-polish on your brass-work ? "

The captain glanced through the scuttle at Walter, and nodded. "He'll do. Took a yacht we picked up mid-Channel back to Southampton single-handed last trip."

"Smart kid, eh ? Does he know anything about motors ? "

Captain Bream touched a bell, which the cabin steward promptly answered, and as promptly departed with a request to the mate, "with the captain's compliments," to send Walters to him.

Peters grinned. "Say, you still stick to the old ceremonies."

"I treat my officers as officers," replied Captain Bream with dignity. "A little courtesy goes a long way."

Peters thought that might be intended as a gentle hint to himself, but his skin was pretty thick and he did not take it seriously. "I guess it's 'stand from under' when you courteous folk get roused," was all he said.

A tap at the door, and Walter came in in time to check any reply from the captain—if he had thought

of making any. Stepping inside, he stood smartly to attention, while Peters looked him up and down approvingly.

"Do you know anything about motors, my lad?" asked Captain Bream.

"Very little, sir. Pottered about in a car at home. Didn't do much, sir—it wasn't mine."

"Ever handled a marine motor in a boat?"

"Not properly, sir. I've been in a quay punt that had one."

"Well. I want you to learn how to handle that new launch we've shipped."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I'll ask the second engineer to come up and explain it to you. Finish what you are doing lively now."

"Ay, ay, sir."

And so it came about that Walter lost another watch below learning the intricacies of the powerful motor fitted in the slim grey launch. The second engineer was an enthusiast. He held the opinion that Diesel engines, and later possibly electric motors, would displace the present marine engines; and he was prepared to talk motors of any kind so long as anyone could be induced to listen.

"This little craft'll shift, sonny," he remarked. "She'll run rings round this old tramp. I'll ask the Old Man to put her in the ditch to-morrow if the weather's fit."

Cape Horn Jack naturally viewed this excursion of Walter's into the realm of engineering with an unfavourable eye, and it would no doubt have afforded the subject-matter for protracted argument had not the weighty words of Mr. Peters, addressed to the assembled hands, turned their thoughts to something of more vital interest. He told them that the Captain had very kindly allowed him to put them wise on one or two points respecting the voyage, and emphasised

one in particular, namely, that there was nothing illegal in what they proposed to do so long as they kept outside the twelve-mile limit; and he wound up by exhorting them to keep their eyes well skinned when they got near their destination.

"There's no need to worry about the Navy boys or the Revenue officers," he said, "but keep a sharp look-out for any other vessel coming a bit close. I'm not giving you any gush when I talk of pirates. They're all that and then some, and if they don't make you walk the plank, they put you in the way of drifting inside that twelve-mile limit, and qualifying for a plank bed and a whole lot of quiet time to sort of think over what a fool you've been. D'ye get me?"

The crew did "get him," and his breezy manner led them to take what he had said on the whole in an approving spirit. Nevertheless his words provided the text for a long commentary that began as soon as they had returned to their quarters, both deck-hands and the "black squad" joining in a discussion that lasted till the end of the second dog-watch, and was not then exhausted.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

THE "GRETCHEN" OF AMSTERDAM

NEXT morning the captain ordered the motor launch to be tried out. The sea was reasonably calm, except for a lazy swell, and there was not enough mist about to matter. Walter was told off to accompany the second engineer, and hurried briskly to his post, other hands, including old Jack, giving a hand at the davits.

"These 'ere new-fangled craft are outside my way

o' thinkin', Coppernob," remarked old Jack, not without a touch of regret in his voice, as though he found the march of progress more than he could stand against.

"Oh, they're all right, Jack," replied Walter. "I'll bet she can hop it."

Captain Bream shouted down from the bridge: "Is she tight? Look her over before you lower her."

Peters, standing by, laughed derisively. "Tight! She's as tight as my Sunday pants. Double skin mahogany under that grey paint."

The steamer was slowed down to a dead stop, and the launch safely dropped into the water. Casting off the tackles, Walter shouted, "All clear!" then gave a turn to the starting handle, and the motor seemed to come to life.

"Run ahead of us," said Captain Bream, "but mind you don't get under our bow when we're going full ahead."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the second with a grin; and added, in an aside to Walter, "That old tramp couldn't catch us in a month of Sundays."

Possibly Captain Bream divined what had been said, for presently the *Raglan* was punching her way along at full speed, with the motor launch a bare hundred yards ahead. Walter, at the wheel, kept the little craft steadily on her course. The motor ran sweetly, and the sharp, clean bow cut through the water with an incisive swish.

"Now, Coppernob," shouted the engineer, after they had been running moderately for a mile or so, "we'll show the skipper what we can do. Keep her steady."

Notch by notch, he moved the accelerator till at last the motor was all out. Exhilarated by the swift rush, so much more pronounced in a small craft nearly on a level with the water than on the deck of a ship,

Walter stared steadily ahead, only turning his eyes now and then to glance at the binnacle, and the minutes passed like seconds. Presently came the sound of a syren, and looking over his shoulder, he saw the *Raglan* a long mile astern.

"Fifteen knots easy," cried the second, delightedly; "maybe more. About ship, and we'll run rings round the *Raglan*."

Sweeping out a graceful curve, the launch came back on her course, met and passed the steamer, "port to port," as the rule of the road demands, and rounding up under her stern, kept pace alongside ready to be picked up.

Captain Bream, who had been watching the run from the bridge, was about to give the order for this to be done when the mate drew his attention to a steamer at some distance, which the look-out had reported a few minutes before.

"She looks broken down, sir."

Turning his glasses on the vessel, now clearly visible on their port bow, the captain examined her carefully. She was a foreigner, possibly Dutch or German, and was not under steam. She had a stay foresail set, and with this keeping her head off shore, was drifting out towards the open Atlantic.

"I expect you'd like a run in that launch, Mister," remarked Captain Bream to the mate, who grinned broadly by way of reply. "Better get into her and run across. Take a bearing of us. I'll put the *Raglan* at ten knots, so you can calculate where we are if any mist comes on."

Shinning down the davit tackle, the mate dropped into the launch, and taking the wheel from Walter, said to the engineer, "Now let's see what she can really do."

The strange ship was four or five miles off, and the launch ate up the distance in fifteen minutes. As

they drew towards her, the mate chuckled. "She's abandoned. What a find!" But he had scarcely spoken when it appeared that she was not abandoned by everybody, for a man came up from a companion-way aft and waved his hat.

"She's a Dutchman all right," the mate next observed, and in this at any rate he was right: soon they were near enough to read her name and port—*Gretchen*, Amsterdam.

From the state of her decks and rigging it seemed pretty clear that the ship had had a rough passage, but from the nature of the damage, a seaman would have judged that the trouble had arisen from something out of the ordinary run of what is to be expected at sea. Two boats were missing, and another was stove in. The bridge and chart-house were badly battered, and the skylight above the fiddley was smashed.

"Been some rum goings on here," said the mate as he ran the launch alongside a rope ladder hanging amidships; then, to the man they had seen aboard, "Are you all on your lonesome?"

"Yes, quite alone—myself and the ship's cat."

"What has happened to you? Are you one of the officers?"

"No, Captain; I was only a passenger."

"H-m-m; well, I'm chief mate of the steamer *Raglan* out there a couple o' miles."

"Thank goodness for that. I was afraid, when I first saw the launch, you were a party of those blackguards coming back."

The mate by this time had climbed to the deck, and was looking round the ship.

"She's nearly empty," explained the passenger pointing to the open hatches fore and aft, "but there's enough cheap gin in her to get her condemned, stowed away with odds and ends of German goods in the after hold."

"That's all right," replied the mate. "We'll deal with that and hear your yarn later on. I want to find out how far she is seaworthy." He glanced into the engine-room. "Dynamite job, eh? L.P. cylinder pretty well used up."

He went to the side and called up the second engineer to report on the engines; meanwhile, he proceeded to make a further examination. In the chart-room he found a tin box containing the usual ship's papers, as well as the log, written up to within three days. "Double Dutch to me, but the Old Man knows enough to get the hang of it." He turned back the pages casually to see if he could identify any names of people or places, and noticed Nassau as the last port of call. "Proper old gin runner—same shady business as we are on." Farther back he found some notes referring to Amsterdam, and one exceptionally long entry took his eye. One or two words he thought he recognised: *Juni* probably stood for June, and *boot* for boat; *Engelschman* could hardly be anything but Englishman; but he could make no sense of it.

"That bit looks interesting," he said. "I'll draw the skipper's special attention to it. . . . This passenger seems a rum 'un. Too cool for my liking. Wonder how he came aboard."

The second engineer now came up from below. "All in good order except that L.P. cylinder, and I fancy there's a chance of fixing that up as a temporary job."

"All right," replied the mate. "Go back with the youngster and tell the captain what we've found. Rub it in about these bullet holes and stains. I reckon that's blood," he added, pointing to an ugly-looking patch near the chart-house door. "While you're gone I'll hear what this chap has to say for himself."

He turned to look for the passenger, but missed him.

"By Jove! he's a cool cove. Walks off as though being picked up on a derelict was an everyday job."

However, the sound of the motor starting up brought the stranger on the scene again. He appeared from the after cabin with an overcoat slung over his arm and a small portmanteau in his hand; and attached to the bag by straps was a long narrow roll tied up in brown paper.

"I went to get my gear," he exclaimed casually. "I thought we might be leaving the ship."

"All in good time," replied the mate easily; then, "How did you come to be aboard her?" he asked abruptly; "where did you join her?"

"I've just come with her from Nassau. I want to get into the States, and without making too much noise about it. Perhaps you'd prefer me to wait and explain the situation to your captain?"

"Lay your boots on it you'll have to do that in any case," snapped the mate, resenting what he took to be a snub.

"Oh, it's quite all right," replied the other, perfectly unruffled. "My name's Hill. I'm on a special mission to the States, and there are excellent reasons why I should get there unobserved. Don't be offended at my not plumping into details, but of course you understand on a job like mine——"

His voice tailed off as though to imply that he could depend on the good sense of the mate to finish the sentence for himself, and refrain from asking awkward questions.

The mate was mollified. "I see," he said; "secret service job. Well, I would rather it was you than me if it has anything to do with liquor running."

"Oh, but it hasn't—nothing at all; but naturally I don't want to get mixed up in any trouble of that sort. In fact, that was the reason why I hid aft when the ship was attacked. I daresay I'm as useful as any

other man in a row, but this was not my row; and while I'm on this job I can't afford to run unnecessary risks."

The mate nodded. "What about the crowd that pirated you? Bootleggers, of course."

"I believe so," replied Hill; "a lot of ruffians anyway. We were off Cape Cod, I think, on the look-out for a schooner that was to take our cargo. It was a bit hazy when a schooner was sighted ahead. I suppose our captain thought it was the right one; anyhow, he let her come alongside, and then the trouble began."

He went on to describe at some length as much as he had seen of the fight, until the mate's attention was diverted by the sight of the launch returning with several hands aboard. He also noticed the *Raglan* making towards them.

"All right," he said, "you must finish later. I expect the skipper's going to make a towing job of this." He went for'ard and looked over what hawsers there were available for work.

As the launch drew alongside he noted with satisfaction that his own men, roused from their watch below, had been detailed for the duty. They, naturally, did not view the curtailing of their rest in quite the same light, and the opinion was expressed that "Coppernob had let them in for a field day good and proper." This was met by, "Don't call this no field day. This job means dollars all round."

"Well, it's done me out of a quiet watch below," declared History Dick, casting a melancholy eye over the *Gretchen;* "and just as I was getting to a bit in my 'French Revolution' where they get busy with the guillotine. Always something happening since Coppernob came aboard."

Setting his men to work for'ard, the mate passed a light line down to the launch. When the *Raglan*

rounded up ahead of the Dutchman, Walter ran the launch across the narrowing space, and, neatly catching a heaving line, joined the two, and thus established communication between the two vessels. A stout rope followed the light line, then the wire hawser, which was made fast to the *Raglan* by double lengths of manilla led from each quarter to divide the strain, and to act as springs and lessen the shock of any sudden jerk that might otherwise snap the wire. Aboard the *Gretchen* the mate set up a similar contrivance, and raised steam in an auxiliary boiler to drive the steam steering-gear.

Then, with the Dutchman in tow, the *Raglan* headed northwards in the direction of the Bay of Fundy. Walter's last duty with the launch that day was to ferry the passenger Hill across to the *Raglan*.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

HILL TELLS HIS STORY

WHEN Captain Bream declared his intention of taking the *Gretchen* into port he met with strong opposition from Mr. Peters.

"Of course I'm going to salvage her," the captain repeated bluntly, "and be hanged to you and your whisky joint. There's more money in dragging that craft into St. John's than in half a dozen of your trips; yes, sir, more for the owners, and decidedly more for me as captain."

Peters fumed and growled for a time; then an idea struck him and he suddenly changed his tone.

"Very well, Captain; as you please; and come to think of it, that old tub may serve us a turn. You can

run right up along the twelve-mile limit, and no one will suspect that a salvage job is a blind."

"I'm going ahead with the salvage anyhow," retorted Captain Bream; "that's a clean job, and whisky-running's dirty."

"All right, Captain," laughed Peters; "we won't start the old argument over again; but of course, if we meet Zebedee K. Johnson's schooner, you won't mind easing down to put the stuff into her?"

"Providing I'm outside the twelve-mile line, and the weather's fine."

"Of course; that's understood."

The arrival of Hill made another complication, disturbing both to Peters and the captain.

"Who are you, anyway?" roared Peters, as Hill began a long-winded explanation of his presence and his business.

"It's sufficient for you, sir, to know that I'm on secret service work, and all I want is to be set ashore on the American coast, with less fuss the better."

"Show us some proof that you're a secret service man," demanded Peters. "Where are your papers or means of identification?"

Hill, leaning back against the cushioned settee in the chart-house, replied with an air of condescension.

"Really, Mr. Peters, you've got a queer idea of intelligence department work. You must surely know that we carry nothing that could give the least clue to what we are. It is impossible for anyone except our own people to detect my credentials. That must be so. Why, man alive," he exclaimed with sudden energy, "if I fail in my mission and get collared by the other crowd, even my own department will refuse to recognise me, and that document will be repudiated as a forgery;" and he pointed to the roll conspicuously attached to the outside of his portmanteau.

"Funny way of carrying an important document,"

commented Captain Bream. "I reckon I'd stow it inside somewhere."

"I prefer my own way, Captain," replied Hill, smiling. "It is where I can see it, and the very fact that it is conspicuous adds, in my opinion, to its safety."

"Well, you're a cool hand," said Captain Bream, "but you're also a dashed good liar."

Hill flushed, then said quietly, "I don't quite follow you."

"Don't you! Well, you told us you joined the *Gretchen* at Nassau. Her log says they picked you up from a small yacht they ran down in the English Channel, and I happen to know the log's right—see?"

Hill for a moment was taken aback. He had not reckoned on the steamer's log being brought up as evidence; and even if it had crossed his mind, the likelihood of the captain of a British tramp steamer being able to read it would have seemed very remote; but, as Captain Bream had said, he was a decidedly cool hand, and his next remark showed it.

"Possibly it does say so. I was not aware you were discussing my movements prior to Nassau. The record in the log is no doubt reasonably correct. I cannot read Dutch to judge for myself."

"The log'll be correct, stake your life on it," answered Captain Bream tersely, "and your secret service yarn doesn't fit in with it."

"Doesn't it? I think it does—or it would if I told you the whole story, which I'm not at liberty to do. My department——"

"Confound your department," interrupted Captain Bream; "you've told us enough already to prove that you're lying."

"Well, have it your own way, Captain," replied Hill, preserving his outwardly calm appearance. "I'll tell you this much to account for my presence

on your ship. It's more than I've any right to say, and it will be a bad day for both of you if you let it go any farther."

"We'll form our own opinion about that," said the captain, "and I daresay we can shoulder the consequences."

"You know enough of international politics," proceeded Hill, "to understand that if the U.S.A. Government could be brought to join the League of Nations, the League would be a much more vital and effective force than it is. Well, probably you don't know that the chief thing that keeps the United States out of it is the influence of a group of Wall Street financiers. Recently—that is to say, a few weeks ago—certain documents came to light in England and France that prove it beyond doubt; and if the case can be brought home to them by their own people—who are the only people, of course, who can act in the matter—their power will most likely be broken. It's not my business to express any opinion on the rights or wrongs of it, though most men, I imagine, will think that a good thing. My business, gentlemen," he continued, throwing a shade more impressiveness into his words, "is to deliver those documents into the proper hands. At present the other party hold the strings, and are prepared to move heaven and earth to prevent their opponents in Congress getting a grip of the papers. They've detectives by the dozen watching European ports, and every likely landing-place in the United States is covered. If I'm caught attempting to land I shall run the risk of a fatal accident—coroner's verdict, 'accidental death'—vote of sympathy from the jury to my relatives, if any, and the papers will disappear.

"The British Government, for diplomatic reasons, cannot move in the matter yet, so I've been selected for the job. When I received my instructions it was

made plain to me that the ordinary means of crossing the Atlantic were closed, and that every Continental connection was watched—even such services as Bennett's cargo boats between London and Boulogne. I decided, therefore, to make my own way to France. Having done a bit of yachting, I hired a small cutter out from Southampton. I calculated on making into one of the smaller harbours in Normandy—Trouville, Ouistreham, or some such place—then heading overland for Lisbon, and getting a passage on some boat bound for the West Indies and the Gulf ports. The rest you know: I was run down in mid-Channel by the *Gretchen* and carried on to Nassau; then, hearing something of the bootlegging game, and the chances it offered for getting ashore quietly, I arranged with the Dutchman, for a substantial consideration, to let me come on here with him."

Peters gave a long whistle and remarked, "Say, now, that's some yarn;" and Hill, seeing that he had made some little impression also on Captain Bream, added, "I've fifty pounds in English Treasury notes waiting for you, sir, the moment you agree to put me ashore in the States. You could do it easily with that motor launch. I should imagine that lad is smart enough to run me in and get back again in a couple of hours."

"Oh, the lad's smart enough," exclaimed Captain Bream. "Anyhow, he was smart enough to take your yacht back to Southampton single-handed after you deserted her."

"What, do you mean to say the cutter was picked up?"

"I do, and I'm calculating on fingering a nice little cheque for our services."

Hill stared in amazement; then, in a jovial voice, exclaimed, "By Jove, Captain! I guess I'm your mascot. First you salvage my cutter, then the steamer

I travel on. Go on—third time's lucky; put me ashore and collect your fifty pounds."

And whether it was because of his weakness for these little perquisites, or because he wanted to get rid of Hill—and he seemed, at any rate, to have been an unlucky passenger—or a little of both, one cannot be sure, but at any rate Captain Bream agreed. They discussed at length the most suitable time and place for the operation to be carried out. Peters expressed his impatience at anything that interfered with the real object of the voyage, but he brightened up considerably on receiving from the wireless room a reply in code to various urgent messages he had been despatching at frequent intervals since leaving Halifax.

"O.K.," he exclaimed after making a quick translation; "that schooner'll meet us between Portland and Frenchman Bay—just where I wanted to go before we left Halifax, but my people were keen on a run near Long Island. There are plenty of places there to dump this customer."

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

ENTER RED JAKE

RUFUS JACKSON, more commonly known among his acquaintances as Red Jake, leaned over the low bulwark of his schooner *Flyaway*, and looked with a meditative eye over the gently heaving water. He chewed rather than smoked a ten-cent cigar—not because there was anything wrong with the cigar, which was of a coarse flavour, certainly, but well suited to his palate, but because he was not quite easy in his mind.

"That's the *Gretchen* anyway, but I'd like to know who's the gol-darned Britisher that's got her in tow."

Jake had no trouble in identifying the Dutchman. Not a great while before he had held her up, looted her of her contraband cargo, disabled her, and left her to drift. So far so good. What had become of her crew he did not know and did not greatly care. They might have got safely ashore in their boats; or possibly they had been cast away on the maze of sandbanks fringing Cape Cod: it was a toss-up either way, and was no concern of his.

No; the fly did not appear in Jake's ointment until, later on, his mate, Frisco, happened to remark casually that he remembered seeing someone aboard the *Gretchen* who looked like a passenger, but that he had not noticed him in either of the boats that left the ship. Consequently Frisco concluded that he had, for some reason of his own, chosen to remain on board.

"Aw, chuck it!" growled Jake, who had not noticed any such passenger himself, "you've been hitting the gin ball and seein' double. If there'd been anyone else on board he'd have chased daylight when that pop fixed up the engine-room."

For all this, and trifling as the circumstance may seem, it was a disturbing suggestion; and now that he saw the *Gretchen* in tow, Jake realised that it might mean a good deal to him. If the steamer was taken safely into Portland with someone aboard her who could identify his schooner it would be awkward, for he—Jake—was well known in that port. At the moment he was anxious to get back to his own headquarters—a quiet little place, well hidden from observation, where, under pretence of carrying on a fish-curing business, he organised schemes of quite a different sort, of some danger and more profit to himself. But it was highly important for its continued prosperity that the real nature of his enterprise should

not become generally known; and therefore Jake considered it incumbent on him to find out where the *Gretchen* might be going.

Shortening sail—for the *Flyaway* was making two feet through the water to the *Raglan's* one—he hung about until he felt reasonably certain that the two steamers would not be headed for Portland; whereat he chuckled.

"I've a hunch he's bound for St. John's. I guess the Ole Man calculates he'll get better weight for his dollars if he tries to buy justice in a Canadian Court than he would from Uncle Sam's lawyers. Maybe he's right."

All sail was then clapped on, and the *Flyaway* ran past the slow-moving steamers, but at a safe distance to avoid any possibility of recognition, and made for the archipelago which fringes the sea-coast of the State of Maine. Winding in through a deep channel behind an island of considerable size and altitude, the schooner dropped anchor a short distance from a wharf on the mainland.

As a haven of refuge for a harassed bootlegger, the place could scarcely have been better. A deep-water inlet ran well inland, ending in what was almost a salt-water lake bordered with spruce trees; and the entrance was sheltered and even hidden from the open sea by the island before mentioned.

"I calculate those two steamboats'll be dragging past here somewheres about sun-up. Send a couple of hands out to the island and tell 'em to report if they sight 'em; likewise if they happen to be doing anything particular."

"Ay, ay, Cap'n," replied Frisco, "I'll see to it. I've a fancy myself it won't do no harm to play safety till t'other fellow shows his hand."

"That's so—not that I care what they do. They'd never recognise us, nor if they did they couldn't prove

anything in an American Court. I reckon I hold four aces."

"Four aces is good, Cap'n, but a royal flush is top call, an' somehow them Britishers is strong on royalties."

For all his boasted indifference, Jake was still uneasy, and when, soon after daybreak, a report was received that the *Raglan* and her tow were in sight, he crossed to the island look-out, and, with his strongest glass, examined the situation himself. The vessels were on the horizon, evidently endeavouring to keep along the limit, but his satisfaction on observing this changed to perplexity when he saw a schooner heading towards them.

"If that light patch is new canvas in that mainsail, it's old Zebedee on the job. Thar'll be some how-de-do if they set him going agin me;" and if Jake did not exactly gnash his teeth like the conventional villain of melodrama, he did the next thing to it, chewing the end of the everlasting coarse cigar, tilted from his lips at an aggressive angle.

Zebedee and he were rather more than rivals. Jake was aware that Zebedee was well enough acquainted with the nature of his business activities to make their continuation on present lines impossible if he chose to talk; and Zebedee was known to be feeling raw over a little affair connected with a special consignment of "rye" in which Jake had, some months previously, unscrupulously got to windward of him. Jake did not think Zebedee would give him away to the Revenue officers, but short of that, he would not be unwilling, probably, to do his rival a bad turn—provided always it brought dollars to himself. And now there he was going out to meet the Britisher with the Dutchman in tow. Jake did not like the look of it.

He waited some minutes to make sure that Zebedee's schooner was really making for the steamers;

then, as she shortened sail to draw up alongside, he decided that it was time to act.

"Get that speed launch ready and come with me," he said shortly.

From a cove on the mainland side of the island they ran out a motor launch—a powerful-looking craft over thirty feet in length, with a high bow and a low, sloping stern, and appropriately named *Rattlesnake*. Twin engines, fitted with effective silencers, hummed like the drone of angry bees as, seated at the wheel, Jake opened out for full speed and headed seaward.

Half an hour later he slowed down almost to a stop.

"Get busy with those lines, and make a show of fishing. There'll sure be a rubber-nose watching us."

He crouched down against the little fore-deck and stared ahead.

"Gee whiz! That Britisher's in the game, and they're handing out the cases fast enough, bet yer life, Mister Zebedee."

An hour went by, and the fishing aboard the *Rattlesnake*, which had been started as a blind, developed into the real thing. Jake had stopped the engines, and it appeared that the launch was drifting in the middle of a shoal of cod. There happened to be a can of bait on board, which was made use of, and very soon the fish were being hauled in.

"Go to it, boys, and hold 'em up high when you get 'em in. Let rubber-nose see you've the goods on you."

His men grinned, and carried out his orders in the spirit of the game.

Another hour passed; then Jake exclaimed, "What the helephant's that move? Get them lines aboard lively, an' stand by."

A motor boat was seen to be putting off from the *Raglan*.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

"RUM ROW"

ON the preceding evening, when the *Raglan*, with her lame duck in tow, had been slowly pushing her way up the Maine coast, word had been passed to the crew to keep a specially sharp look-out for vessels of all kinds, and particularly for schooners. Mr. Peters had displayed an unwonted excitement, and had himself emphasised the need for caution to several of the hands.

"We don't want to butt up against Revenue folk, likewise we don't want any of those help-yourself gentlemen alongside—get me? Keep your eyes skinned, and give us plenty of warning. The ship we want'll make a private signal."

The crew, ready to welcome anything what would break the monotony of the voyage, responded in a proper spirit—all, that is to say, with the exception of Cape Horn Jack, who took a gloomy view of the whole business.

"Sort o' messing about job, goin' to tranship cargo into a sailing boat when we've got a derelict half as big agin as ourselves in tow. Asking for trouble, that's what it is."

"That's all right," replied History Dick with a laugh. "Captain Bream'll know how to handle it."

"So he will," agreed old Jack; "leastways, if he don't, there ain't no one aboard this 'ere hooker can teach him; no, not even Mr. Peters, what seems to know everything."

"What's likely to happen, Jack?" inquired Walter.

"Lots o' things, Coppernob me lad. Things what can't be explained. For instance, when we stop

moving ahead, the *Gretchen* may take it into her head to run down on us—why, I don't know, an' you don't know, except that scientific chaps what has learned a bit from able seamen says that two vessels out of control will try to drift together if they find themselves near each other to start with. Then, if she doesn't hit us, maybe she'll get that tow rope foul of us aft. Lor, we'd look a lively lot with a foul propeller, an' the *Gretchen* up agin us, drifting in just where those Yankee Revenue men wants us. I'm no admirer o' Yankee gaols, even if they do have gramophone concerts o' nights an' picture shows on a Sunday."

"You're a pessimist, Jack, old sport," said Blewitt.

"An' what the hooker is a pessimist?" asked the old man with a glare.

"Well, a pessimist is an optimist what's took the wrong turning."

"Ho, it is, is it. Well, my discharges show me as sixty-five last March, an' I've never bothered them blokes for glasses yet, an' don't see no call to."

Blewitt winked solemnly at Walter, who kept a square face, and remarked, "Seagoin's wonderful good for the eyesight, Jack."

"That's so. I can see as far through a dock wall as any land-lubber."

"That's right, Jack," History Dick broke in; "an' you know how to turn a blind eye to things, same as Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar."

"Maybe he did," agreed old Jack. "He was fighting some o' them Frenchies, wasn't he?"

"That's so," replied Dick, eager to expand on his favourite theme; but old Jack went on, "What beats me is this: what do these 'ere foreigners want to come to sea for?" and the conversation swung round to the subject of foreign seamen in British ships, ending in an all-round condemnation of the Board of Trade for allowing it.

Walter's watch was below from midnight till four a.m., and when they came on deck they found that both Captain Bream and Mr. Peters were out, anxiously scanning the horizon in the dim light of early dawn.

Walter was ordered to the fo'c'sle head as look-out. He had not been there long before he sighted a distant schooner, and hailed accordingly. The vessel, which was bearing down on them, showed a lantern over the side, and presently ran up a string of flags, which fluttered for a few moments and were then hauled down, without having been read by anyone on board the *Raglan*.

She was a fine specimen of fishing schooner, easy as a yacht to handle, yet one of the largest type used on the Banks. Shortening sail, her skipper rounded up and came alongside the steamer, putting out huge fenders to save her sides from damage. Hawsers were passed fore and aft, and in the calm sea the schooner rode as comfortably as if alongside a quay.

Mr. Peters now openly took the direction of affairs. The *Raglan's* forward hatches were opened, and, at top speed, case after case was slung over into the schooner's hold. All the deck-hands on the *Raglan* turned to, except for one man at the helm, for Captain Bream had foreseen the awkward complications that might arise if his own vessel and the *Gretchen* were allowed to drift together, which had worried old Jack, and prevented them by keeping his engines moving slowly ahead; also, to prevent any mistake, he altered the course an extra point off shore.

Hill watched the proceedings from the bridge deck. He said nothing until the work had become so automatic that even Mr. Peters saw no further necessity for shouting and hustling the crew. Then, taking the opportunity of a momentary lull, he approached Captain Bream.

"How about setting me ashore with the launch while we're waiting here? I see she's still in the water, and perhaps you could spare that youngster for a couple of hours?"

Peters objected in strong terms; he would not allow anything to interfere with the work in hand; nor was he any better pleased with Captain Bream's suggestion that Hill might like to go off in the schooner.

"No, he doesn't, Mister. I guess there's no room for secret service men on that craft—not that I believe his blamed yarn a scrap."

"Whether you believe it or not doesn't interest me, Mr. Peters," retorted Hill in a frigid tone. "Captain, I'm waiting the pleasure of handing you this little roll of notes, if you'll be so good."

"Aw, get shut of him!" said Peters in disgust. "Dump him over the side; but tell that lad of yours to step on the gas and get back lively. I want the schooner away in an hour."

Walter was therefore called off from helping in the unloading, and ordered to take Hill ashore in the launch. He filled the petrol tanks and pocketed some food from the galley, then reported that he was ready to start.

"Run westward of that island," said Captain Bream, "then coast along to the eastward and look for a quiet place. You don't want to get questions asked by running into any harbour. Our course will be East-by-North when we leave here, and we're twelve miles off shore. You'll be all right if we don't get fog. If we do, you must use your head, and make along the coast for St. John's. You've got plenty of petrol?"

"Yes, sir; tanks full and some to spare."

Walter made a careful note of the captain's instructions, then climbed down into the launch, and stood ready to help Hill if he needed a hand.

"What's that fellow doing out there?" asked Captain Bream, turning to Peters and pointing to a boat some two miles off.

Peters stared at it intently for a moment, then laughed easily. "Line fishing. A spot of gasolene helps those fellows to get off shore, spill their lines, make a haul, and get home again in less time than it would take them to row out."

For a little while they stood watching the launch as it sped away, then turned their attention once more to the work of unloading.

In the launch Hill, having seen his portmanteau stowed to his liking, took a seat near Walter. His eyes roved the distant coastline, which had seemed nearer from the altitude of the steamer's deck; then, giving a glance round, he sighted the other small craft that had attracted the notice of Captain Bream. The crew had been fishing, but they had now hauled in their lines; and, after watching the boat for some moments, Hill felt uncomfortably certain that it was following them.

"Open her out, boy," he said irritably; "open her out. We seem to be crawling. Get away from that fishing boat."

"We're going all out, sir—every bit of seventeen knots," replied Walter; and glancing hurriedly over his shoulder, he added, "And, by Jove! that fishing boat can go, can't she?"

He was by no means averse to a race, and, carefully adjusting gas and ignition, he tried to get the most out of the launch. For half an hour they held their own. The *Raglan* was now a shadow on the horizon, and ahead the American coast was taking definite shape: the undulating outline of bold cliffs, indented by numerous creeks, could be distinctly seen.

"I wish you could shake that fellow off," said Hill petulantly; "can't you get a bit more out of her?"

"Not an ounce; she's at her limit."

"Alter your course eastward, then; I don't want him about when I land."

Walter let the launch come round a couple of points; then steadying her on her new course, he looked back, and what he saw caused him to gasp and his heart to beat wildly. The pursuing vessel had likewise altered her course and had put on speed; the distance between the two was being rapidly reduced. That much he saw at a glance; and another thing, which sent an unpleasant sensation down his spine: leaning over her decked-in bow was a red-headed man with a revolver in his hand.

Putting his helm hard over, he made an attempt to get away by zig-zagging, but to no purpose; he had no chance against the powerful twin-screw launch, which seemed to swing round on its heel with no perceptible effort.

Two or three anxious minutes passed; then Walter straightened out his course and waited.

"Turn off the gas and stick your hands up slick!" came the terse order from the red-headed man, and it was backed up by the pointing barrel of the revolver. Then, addressing his own men, "Jump in, boys, and tie 'em up."

Hill began to storm and to demand what they meant by such an outrage, but Red Jake did not waste any breath on a reply. His crew swarmed over the side; Walter was dragged away from the helm; lines were passed round his arms and legs, and he was deposited none too gently in the bottom of the launch, where Hill the next moment joined him in similar case.

"I guess you 'an me'll have a talk when I gets you ashore," observed Red Jake in a matter-of-fact tone. His men said nothing at all, and in a few moments both boats were got under way.

From the bridge of the *Raglan* Captain Bream, through his binoculars, had seen them drawing together and afterwards approaching the shore in company, but he had no inkling of what had happened. "They're nearly in," he remarked casually to Peters, "and your fisherman has turned it up and made for home. It's to be hoped he don't scent fog."

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

RACHETT'S HARBOUR

THE Golden Sunrise Fish Canning and Curing Corporation, of Rachett's Harbour, Maine, judging from the particulars of it given on its picturesque bill-heads and memorandum forms, was an imposing and flourishing concern. Rachett's Harbour, also, according to the same authority, was a busy port with a great quantity of shipping—most of which, it would appear, was bound to or from the wharves of the Golden Sunrise Fish Canning and Curing Corporation.

A visitor, however, coming to the place for the first time, would have been forced to the conclusion that the artist who had designed the bill-heads and memorandum forms in question was a person of lively imagination, if his engravings were intended to represent the collection of tumble-down sheds standing at the mouth of a quiet waterway, at least twenty miles from the nearest railway depot—and that an exceedingly small one with a staff of one, who was station-master, telegraph operator, luggage porter, and ticket puncher combined. Red Jake, in an expansive moment, had said that there were more dollars in moonshine

than in Golden Sunrise, and he, as president of the latter corporation, should have known.

Once inside the shelter of the island that hid Rachett's Harbour from the open sea, he ran the *Rattlesnake* alongside the *Raglan's* launch, and had Hill and Walter transferred to his own craft. Hill's portmanteau was also slung on board. Then, running to a mooring buoy, the *Raglan's* launch was made fast under the shelter of the island, and the larger vessel was taken to the wharf on the mainland.

"Say now," remarked Jake, "do you two fellows know enough to come in out of the wet—get me?"

"What do you want?" snapped Hill, whose wrists were aching from the bonds that held them behind his back.

"Wal, if I cut you adrift, will you watch your step and not try to fade away? I've got a date with you guys—an important business conference; get it?"

Apparently Hill did not "get it." "I don't know what you want with us," he replied. "We've got no business of any interest to you. I suppose you've mistaken us for someone else."

"Bet yer life I haven't. I saw you come off the steamboat old Zebedee's trading with, so cut out the bluff. Will you walk or be carried?"

"We'll walk," said Hill; and at a sign from Jake, his men freed the prisoners of the cords that bound them.

Clambering up the ramshackle wharf, they followed a pathway to the collection of sheds, and, entering through a wide gateway, found themselves in an enclosure that brought to Walter's mind a picture he had once seen of the stockade on Treasure Island.

"Go right ahead," ordered Jake, still fingering his revolver suggestively. They were conducted into the smaller of two log huts, which, joined together, were the most substantial block of buildings in the

place, all the others being merely frame sheds lightly planked. The heavy door was shut on them and a bar made fast across it. Light came through two narrow windows, the glass of which was cracked and broken ; and the furniture of the hut consisted of a deal table and a form without a back.

Hill was in a sulky mood. " Don't see much chance of getting out of here," he said after making inspection of the walls, " and we can't fasten the door from this side." He cast his eye over the dirty planking of the floor, then, with a sudden burst of energy, pointing to one corner of the hut, rapped out, " Quick, boy, up with that bit of plank."

Walter wrenched up a loose board, and watched Hill hide carefully under the flooring the roll which he had brought in strapped to his portmanteau. Then, opening the bag, he made another roll out of newspapers and a piece of brown paper, and strapped this on in its place.

He had barely finished when the door opened and a man appeared with two plates of steaming food and a large can of coffee.

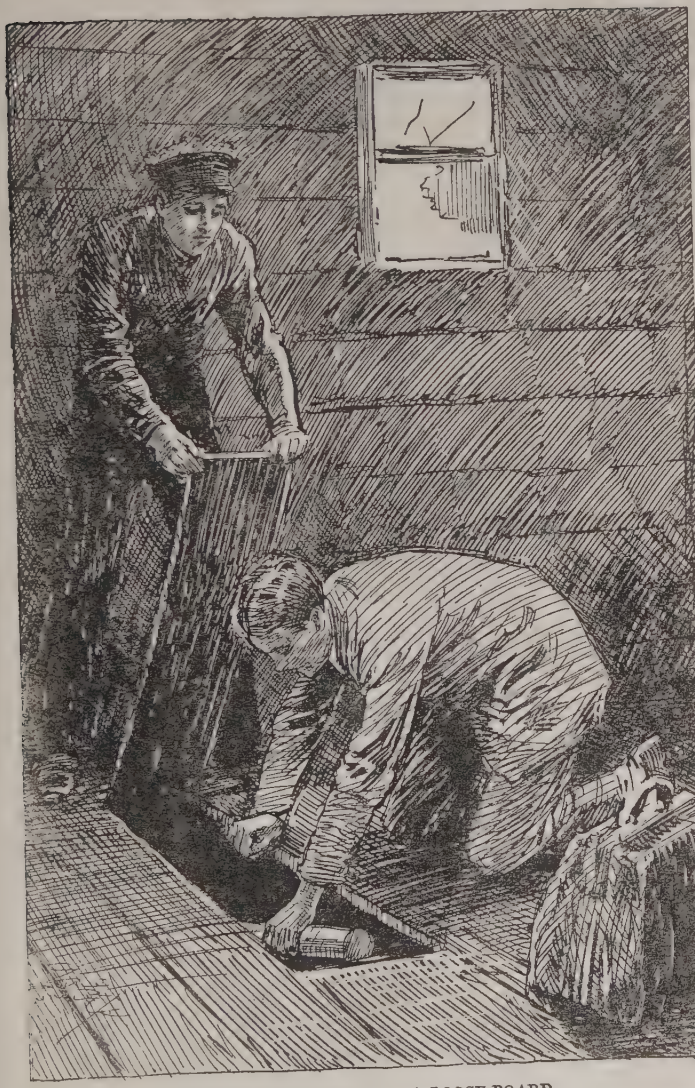
" The boss ain't goin' to starve you, so eat this."

" This " appeared to be coarse rashers of bacon and boiled butter beans. The coffee was cloudy and strong. Hill turned from it at first in disgust, but afterwards ate a little. Walter, however, was hungry, and his training on fo'c'sle fare had made him less fastidious ; he set to work with an appetite.

" Wonder if this is the orthodox American beans and bacon ? " he asked, but Hill was in no mind for joking.

" It's beastly stuff," he said, " and these men mean mischief. Now remember, whatever happens, not a word about the roll of documents. I suppose Captain Bream told you who I am ? "

" No ; but there was a yarn for'ard that you were a secret service man."



WALTER WRENCHED UP A LOOSE BOARD.

"That's right, and on a special job, but nothing to do with this rum-running—something far more important. Remember, if you are questioned, you know nothing about me except that I was a passenger."

"I may have to admit that you came off the *Gretchen*," suggested Walter.

Hill thought for a moment, then nodded. "Possibly you may, but don't say so unless you are asked."

"Wonder if Captain Bream will send ashore for me when he finds I don't return?"

"Don't know. Most likely he won't. You see, the business he's got on hand rather complicates matters. Mr. Peters may object, and his authority seems to go a long way."

Walter sat in silence for some time thinking over the position, but without coming to any clearer understanding of it. The fact that he was, for some unaccountable reason, being detained as a prisoner, while it was awkward, did not worry him so much as the idea of losing his berth on the *Raglan*. Luckily, in his jacket pocket he had his papers, also some money in his belt. This might make it easier for him to get another ship, but he would be sorry to leave the *Raglan*—to lose what he felt to be the interest of the captain, and the companionship of Cape Horn Jack and the others.

His reflections were interrupted by the door being opened again; a man thrust his body half inside, and, looking straight at Walter, said casually, "You, bub, the boss wants to talk to you."

Hill also started up, but was repulsed with, "Stay you right there, Mister. 'Tain't a public meetin'."

Following the speaker, who had taken care to shut and bar the door after him, and with another man carelessly slouching along behind, Walter entered the next and larger hut. This he found to be furnished as a sort of office and living-room combined. A table,

with some dirty crockery on it, stood in one corner ; a roll-top desk and an office chair held the place of honour in the centre, and a lounge chair, and others of the kitchen variety, were scattered round—indications of refinement that raised the place distinctly higher in the social scale than the hut in which the prisoners were confined.

Red Jake occupied the office chair completely, also a portion of the desk : his long legs, encased in sea-boots, were crossed with the heels resting on a ragged blotting pad ; and the chair was tilted backwards at a comfortable angle. A long thin cigar pointed ceilingwards from his lips, and waved, semaphore fashion, as he spoke. At intervals he removed it, and sent accurately-gauged shots alternately at a brass spittoon and through the open window with a precision that bespoke long and continuous practice.

" Wal, bub, enjoy your breakfast ? " he demanded when Walter stood before him.

Walter hardly knew how to take this opening, but the thought flashed through his mind that it would not be amiss to meet Jake on his own ground with an outward show of indifference.

" Not bad, thanks," he answered, " but I don't think much of your famous American beans."

Jake laughed. " Say, now, that's a right shame. I'll tell my chef. We raise fifty-seven varieties, all guaranteed to give a Britisher indigestion."

Walter merely nodded, and awaited the next question. It came in a gruffer tone.

" Now say right here, who are you, and where were you bound with that launch ? "

" Ordinary seaman on the *Raglan*, and by captain's orders I was going to set that passenger ashore on the mainland."

" What's your captain's name ? "

" Bream."

"What was the *Raglan's* cargo, and where is she bound?"

"Mixed cargo, general goods and cases; but I don't know much about the programme—they don't explain the owner's business to the fo'c'sle."

"You just answer my questions and cut out the flim-flam. Now, who's the guy you were ferrying ashore?"

"His name is Hill; he was a passenger."

"Now come across with it—what else is he?"

"I know practically nothing about him."

"Did you hike him across from England?"

"No, we picked him up from the *Gretchen*."

"Another bootlegger—go on."

"He says he is a Government officer, but he has nothing to do with bootlegging—he isn't interested in it."

"That's his talk, is it? Well, what did old Zebedee send him ashore here for?"

"Who's Zebedee?—I don't know him."

"He's captain of that schooner that came out to lift your stuff. Are you certain Hill didn't come out with him?"

"Hill was aboard the *Raglan* two days before we met the schooner, and I never saw him near the schooner's people. I overheard Captain Bream suggest that Hill should go ashore with the schooner, but Mr. Peters, who is in charge of the cargo, objected."

"So you fell for it to plant him in U.S.A.?"

"That's so."

"All right, Mr. Ordinary Seaman, get back to your kennel."

Now although the President of the Golden Sunrise Fish Canning and Curing Corporation might be some kind of social outlaw, and would doubtless prove a tough customer to deal with when put to it, it did not seem to Walter that he was quite the bloodthirsty

ruffian one might have expected him to be from his high-handed action in pirating the launch and shutting up its crew in his own private stronghold. At any rate, taking the measure of the man, Walter decided that it would pay him best to show a bold front.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind answering a question yourself?" he said. "When do I get back to my ship?"

Red Jake favoured him with a prolonged glare before replying. "I guess I'll decide on that later. I'm holding on to you two till I find out if your yarn stands up."

"Kidnapping is a risky game in a civilised country; but perhaps over here——"

"Say, now, cut it out. I'll take a bit from you 'cause you're red-headed same as myself, and it runs in the blood. You use your savvy and get in out of the wet."

Walter returned to the prisoners' hut, where Hill, who was awaiting him in some anxiety, at once demanded to know what had taken place.

"Keep your mouth shut, bub," said his escort; "an' you, Mister, get a move on, an' don't keep the boss waitin'."

Hill marched out with a truculent air, and, entering Red Jake's office, got in the first word.

"Now, what's your game? What right have you to keep me shut up here?"

Jake regarded him in silence for a moment, as though he were an interesting specimen of fish in an aquarium; then he drawled out, "Aw, come down off it—you're treading on your foot."

"What do you want with me and that lad? I demand an explanation," fumed Hill.

"Say, Mister, cut it out, or you're liable to get a shock. I guess I'll ask the questions, and you'll speak up straight or you'll get it where the chicken got it. Savvy?"

"Well, what do you want to know?"

"All about you, Mister—facts, mind you; not a yarn for the movies. What did Zebedee send you ashore here for?"

"You're talking rubbish. I don't know any Zebedee."

"That's a lie—you do; so come across with it. What's the plant?"

"If by Zebedee you mean the blackguard——"

"That's better, Mister. He's all that and then some."

"Well, I never knew of his existence until I heard his name on the *Raglan*. I've never met him—never spoken to him."

"What's your name?"

"Hill."

"And your job?—no lies, now."

"Confidential work—nothing to do with your business."

"Go on—call it bootlegging. You won't hurt me any."

"I'm not interested in it a bit. All I want to do is to get away quietly to Chicago."

"T'Chicago—wal, you pronounced that like a Britisher. Got any papers on you to show who you are?"

Somewhat reluctantly, Hill produced a passport. Red Jake examined it and sneered at the photograph; then he noticed that it was available for France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland.

"No mention of the United States in this. What are you playing—another bluff?"

"I've given you the plain facts. My business has nothing to do with your affairs. It was necessary for me to get ashore quietly, and I'm going right inland. I can keep quiet about what I've seen here, and you can do the same about landing me."

"I reckon I'll do the saying on that, Mister, and you'll do what I tell you. If you were on the square you wouldn't come ashore at this one-hoss place, twenty miles from a depot."

"You can take me to your station, or depot, or whatever you call it, and see me leave the district. In fact, you can send a man with me to Chicago if you like."

"I guess I can, and I guess I ain't going to. You'll stop here till I say go, and if you get up to any funny business—wal, I guess no one will miss you, seeing as you ain't an expected visitor to God's own country."

Hill moved uneasily. "I hope I shan't be indebted to you for hospitality very long," he said with an attempt at sarcasm that was quite thrown away on Red Jake.

"You'll stay right here till I'm satisfied Zebedee's got nothing on me with your coming ashore; then I'll dispose of you and that youngster, barring I've rather cottoned on to him. Maybe he'll join us."

Hill had been long enough in Walter's company to know that that was not at all likely, and said so.

"Wal, I guess I'll ask him, and I'd rather take his word that yours anyway. Now you can git."

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

RED JAKE MAKES A PROPOSITION

THE day passed drearily. The two prisoners had nothing to do but to conjecture what Red Jake intended to do with them, and to this question they could find no satisfactory answer, their conversation always drifting back to the point from which it started. Once Hill tried to draw Walter out on the subject of his own

personal history, for he could tell that the boy was not an ordinary steamboat deck-hand ; but some instinct made Walter cautious, and he kept silence respecting his family affairs, confining his talk chiefly to his brief experience at sea. He did not exactly mistrust Hill, but he thought it wiser not to reveal more than was necessary to a secret service official such as he understood Hill to be. He had no desire to enlarge on his reason for leaving Malmeswick and coming to sea, and he made no mention of Steepleborough.

A diversion occurred in the afternoon, when a few boxes of fish were brought ashore. Walter, from one of the narrow windows, watched the work leisurely going forward, and the thought occurred to him that the men in charge of it were very careless in leaving the boxes lying exposed to the sun.

Then a ramshackle motor-car appeared on the scene ; its wings were battered, half the bonnet was missing, and a dray of rough planking had been fixed in the position once occupied by the back seats. It was held together by odds and ends of rope, and its paint had nearly all disappeared. Altogether, it was as dilapidated a specimen of a " tin Lizzie " as one would expect to find anywhere but on a scrap-heap, and was, in consequence, fully in keeping with the rest of the properties of the Golden Sunrise Fish Canning and Curing Corporation.

Hill settled down morosely in a corner of the hut and took no interest in what was going on, but Walter continued watching. It was, at any rate, a break in the monotony of doing nothing.

" Oh, by Jove ! what a game," he remarked presently.

" What's up now ? " asked Hill.

" They're loading up their smuggled stuff on that old contraption ; stowing bottles at the bottom of fish tubs, putting in a bit of straw and ice, then topping it all off with fish. What a stunt ! "

Twenty tubs were loaded, until the back springs of the ancient car seemed on the point of collapse. Then, with a splutter and rattle like a tinsmith's shop, the car bumped its way out of the stockade and headed inland. Walter listened till the sound died away, and saw the men leave their work and close the sheds. Three of them went out of the yard; another, with Red Jake, shut the double doors behind them and put a beam across.

After this another meal was prepared—fish, coarse bread, and strong tea. Later Walter was called out to help carry in some sacks of straw and old blankets, on which he and Hill were to sleep.

About an hour after sunset they heard the motor return. The gates were opened, and the driver steered towards an open shed where he pulled up, and, giving no further attention to the car, strode off with Red Jake.

Having nothing better to do, the prisoners turned in for the night. The bedding, if not luxurious, was comfortable, and Walter's nose, inured to fo'c'sle smells, was not worried by the odour of stale fish from the sacking. Having been up since 4 a.m., he slept soundly, till a man came in with their breakfast.

"Get this inside you," he growled; "then the boss says you can walk a bit in the yard; but don't try to bolt or you'll get a dose o' lead."

Hill still maintained his sulky attitude, so the breakfast was not enlivened by conversation. Going outside afterwards, they saw Red Jake seated on a low stool, tilted backwards at his favourite angle and propped up against the wall of the hut. He was smoking the inevitable cigar.

Hill at once strode up to him. "How long's this game going to last?" he demanded savagely.

"Aw, go away; you make me tired. Say, there's a bucket over thar—get a sloosh and freshen your

brains up. You don't know when you're well off."

Walter, realising that bluster of this sort was only likely to make matters worse, resolved to keep to the line of cheerful indifference he had taken up the day before.

"A sloosh is better than nothing," he said; "but, by Jove! boss, I could do with a swim."

Red Jake stared at him for a moment, then straightened up on his stool and beckoned him nearer.

"Son, if you'll give me your solemn word to come back here in an hour, you can go out of the gate and get a bathe."

"Oh, we'll do that all right," replied Hill, breaking in.

"Close your face up—I wasn't talking to you," snapped Jake. "When I trust you outside you'll have a dog's collar and a lead on."

"If you'll let me go down for a swim," said Walter, "I'll promise to be back in an hour as near as I can guess it."

"Good enough, bub; off you go. And say, don't swim far out—there's a nasty bit of tide running."

"Thanks, boss, I'll take care," and he made an eager rush for the gate.

The summer sun was warm, but when he had scrambled out to a convenient rock and dived in, he found the water just a bit chilly. It induced him to strike out vigorously; so much so that Red Jake and Frisco, watching him, were moved to expressions of surprise at the speed with which he cut through the water.

"Well, by hech, he ain't a swimmer—he's a bloomin'—bloomin' —what the hech is he?"

"Fish," suggested Frisco.

"Fish be blamed. He's a torpedo, that's what he is."

"He's making for the launch—think he's going to bolt?"

Red Jake slipped his hand towards his hip pocket, then he laughed. " Not he. I reckon if that lad says he's coming back, wal, so he is ; and it'd take a lot and then some to stop a red-headed guy like him, anyway."

All the same, they kept their eyes on Walter, who, coming up to the launch, scrambled on board, using the rudder as a step, and, standing on the narrow side-deck, stretched himself and enjoyed the warm sun on his tingling skin. Then he walked slowly for'ard, and on the high bow poised himself for a dive.

" Gee whiz! " ejaculated Jake, looking through his binoculars, " he's like one o' them plaster models what they decorate fancy fountains with in millionaires' front gardens."

Conscious that he was being watched, Walter was careful not to seem to be making an inspection of the motor launch, but he noticed several things that it might be useful to know, one of which was that she could be cast adrift from her mooring without much trouble. Then he plunged in, and made for the rocks where he had left his clothes. The sun quickly dried him, and he dressed slowly, to fill in, as far as he could estimate, the allotted hour. He scanned the estuary thoroughly, studying the apparent set of the tide, and noted where a reef of rocks ran out into the open channel. He had no particular scheme in his mind for making use of this knowledge, but—well, it might come in handy, so he studied it as he dressed. Then he returned to the stockade.

He found Red Jake leaning against the gateway.

" Say, you're a hundred cents to the dollar when it's swimming," he remarked admiringly.

Walter did not quite grasp the idiom. " It was fine," he said, " but the water was a bit nippy. Thanks for letting me go down."

He was about to walk on when Jake continued,

"Hold hard, I want to put a proposition to you. I can do with a straight fellow like you with some stuffing in him. Will you join me? You'll make more dollars in a month than in ten years steamboating. Is it a go?"

Walter was utterly taken aback. He knew that Americans were hustlers—or at any rate, liked to be thought so—but it was astonishing that this man, who had known him but a bare twenty-four hours, should be offering him, not merely his liberty, but a share in his own business—and such a business! Quick to reply at most times, he was now at a loss what to say.

"Why, it's jolly good of you, of course—but, you see—well—I want to rejoin my ship. I'm trying to put time in and get an officer's ticket."

Jake nodded. "Go on, son; say all you've got to say. And where do you reckon an officer's ticket'll place you?"

"On a big ship—skipper of one later on, if I'm lucky."

"There ain't many dollars in that programme, but a mighty lot of hard work and waiting."

"Perhaps so, but I want to do it, and I'm going to make a try for it."

"Wal, I wish you luck," said Jake, "but I calculate you're too good a man to make a gilt-edged bridge ornament of. If you change your mind any time, tell me, and the job's yours."

Walter went on towards the hut, and Jake turned to rejoin Frisco.

"That cub's got some breed in him," he declared, "and if he was my son I'd shove him in Uncle Sam's Navy. Say, boy, he'd go to the top."

"Sure he ain't bluffing you?" queried Frisco.

"Bluff be blamed! I'd put him on the night mail for St. John's to join his ship if it wasn't for that other swab with the yaller streak in him."

Hill pounced on Walter as soon as they were out of earshot with eager inquiries about the lay of the land outside, and whether his excursion had given him any idea of a way of escape.

"No, nothing particular. Their launch is there, ready for sea, I should think. She carries a big supply of petrol by the look of her tanks. Of course, if we could get out of here we might make a dash for it; but they're all wide awake, and we'd be shot down easy. Our launch is still on her mooring over by that schooner."

Hill nodded. "Sounds risky; but if we got out of our hut in the night, we could soon climb that gate."

Walter agreed. "This stockade is built to keep people out rather than in. It is ten foot high and smooth walls outside, and every plank has a sharp-pointed top."

Hill muttered something under his breath, then added, "Well, it's no use getting shot. My job is to keep alive. Perhaps we'd better wait a day or so, and see what happens. They're a crafty lot. They've been through my bag while we've been out here—and much good may it do them, for there was nothing in it that could tell them anything; and as for my bit of money, I carry it on me."

"So do I," laughed Walter, "what there is of it."

"Perhaps I can put you in the way of making a bit more if you play up to me. I advise you to keep well in with that fellow Jake—he seems to have taken a fancy to you"—there was a trace of a sneer in his voice as he said it; "it may come in useful."

They strolled round and round the dusty yard till they were called in for the mid-day meal. During the afternoon something else of interest occurred. Red Jake and Frisco went off to sea in the schooner, and the prisoners heard some final words of exhortation which Jake addressed to the man left on guard.

" Now, Tampa Joe, watch your step, and don't get hitting the rye. You want that trigger finger of yours nice and limber. You can trust the lad after he's given his word, but t'other fellow's a bounce—a half-breed."

Walter smiled, for he had a notion that this was a carefully staged bit of by-play for the purpose of impressing the prisoners rather than a serious instruction to Joe. Nevertheless, he did not doubt that Joe would " watch his step " according to orders.

They spent some time that evening working out the possibility of boring a tunnel under the walls of the hut, but came to the conclusion that there was no hope of escape that way. For one thing, they had no tools ; and they found that the soil under the flooring was hard and rocky, through which it would have been a slow and laborious process to cut a way even with tools.

" It means cutting out about two cubic yards of stuff at least, and where are we to stow it ? " asked Walter, making a hasty calculation. " We can't dump a cartload out through the window without being twigged, and there's no room inside."

Hill was reluctant to abandon the idea. " You're on such good terms with them," he said, " perhaps you're not anxious to get away."

" You bet I am, but we must think of a better way than that."

The following day brought little change. After breakfast they strolled about the yard. Tampa Joe did not give Walter an opportunity for another bathe, and Walter did not care to ask.

They had walked from end to end of the enclosure half a dozen times when Tampa Joe, who was watching them closely, remarked, " Say, bub, is that a tin can on the corner of that roofing ? "

Walter looked in the direction indicated by Joe. " Yes, I think it is," he replied ; " a condensed milk

tin or a small fruit tin. I hadn't noticed it there before. Why ? "

" Wal, it won't be thar long ; " and with a sudden swing of the arm, Joe drew an automatic, and sent the tin flying over the stockade with a well-placed bullet.

" Oh, good shot ! " cried Walter. " Jove, that takes some doing ! "

" Does it, son ? Wal, pick up another an' throw it as high as you can."

Walter did so. He had ample choice from a refuse heap, and picked out a small and fairly heavy one for a good throw.

As the tin reached its highest point, crack went the pistol, and a sharp ping told that the bullet had reached its mark. A second crack followed, and a third, and the piece of battered tin fell a dozen yards away with three clean bullet holes in it.

Tampa Joe laughed and replaced the automatic. " Reckon it'd take a darn good Britisher to beat that," he said.

Walter was annoyed, for he guessed there was more in this exhibition than a mere desire to keep the prisoners amused ; and he determined, therefore, not to appear too greatly impressed by Joe's prowess.

" The average man couldn't do it, of course," he replied off-handedly, " but put one of our crack shots in your launch, and he'd drive a tin like that right across to the island without letting it touch the water."

Joe's jaw dropped ; then he exploded in laughter. " Now, by hech, you're some liar ; " and turning on his heel in disgust, he walked into the big hut.

Early the following morning they were disturbed by the arrival home of the schooner. From their window they could see cases being rapidly rushed ashore on the jetty and into the stockade. They were taken into

a very small hut, and presently it occurred to Walter that the hut was receiving more cases than it could possibly hold, yet more and still more were being carried into it.

"There's a cave or cellar under that hut," he observed to Hill. "It may be worth our while to take a look round it."

But the opportunity of taking such a look round did not occur. As they were taking a belated breakfast, they were suddenly ordered outside; a man grabbed Hill's bag, and they were marched down the jetty and on to the schooner.

Hill's anger on finding that he was to make an abrupt departure from Rachett's Harbour was as great as it had been on being brought there. The violence of his language startled Walter, who was at a loss to account for it, until he remembered the roll hidden under the floor of the hut. Then he thought he might make an attempt to get it.

"I say, should I ask permission to go——"

"No, you young ass; shut up!" growled Hill in an undertone, and followed it up by another burst of protest against his removal.

Tampa Joe, hearing an argument of some sort going on, stepped forward, carelessly swinging his automatic.

"Close your hash trap and get aboard lively, or I'll clip your ears off with bits o' lead. Jump to it now!"

Thus persuaded, Hill walked down the rickety jetty, and crossed the gangway, followed by Walter, who did not share his regret at finding himself afloat once more. Red Jake met them, and, pointing to the after cuddy hatch, said, "Get below you, and stay there till I want you."

A few minutes later they heard an auxiliary motor being started up, and the schooner was headed for the

open sea ; also the creaking of blocks and rattle of canvas told of sail being hoisted. Eastward along the coast the *Flyaway* did her best to live up to her name. When the vessel was well off shore Walter and Hill were allowed on deck.

" Better than the dusty old fish yard, son ? " said Jake affably.

" Rather ! " replied Walter. " Fine boat you've got."

" The ole gal's all right, but her propeller robs her of a knot or more when sailing. Anyhow, we can't have it both ways."

Hill had moved sulkily to the lee rail, and was leaning over, taking no notice of anyone. Jake jerked a thumb in his direction. " Your pal don't seem none pleased to leave our happy little home. Wal, the joke's on him, I guess ; " and with a chuckle he walked away.

The remark puzzled Walter. The joke certainly was " on " Hill if his hidden roll was of any real value and the bootleggers had discovered it. Perhaps they had, and that was their reason for taking them off so suddenly ; but on reflection, Walter did not think this very likely. He had placed Hill's straw bed over the spot where the roll was hidden, and he was fairly sure it had not been disturbed. Still, Jake's remark was curious.

Evening of the following day found the *Flyaway* edging in towards a rocky shore. When it was almost dark a boat was lowered, and Red Jake called Hill and Walter to him.

" I'm going to set you ashore to go where you like," he said ; " but listen well to what I tell you. If I clap eyes on you, Mister, anywheres along Maine coast, I'll fill you full o' lead ; and you, son, will find it healthy to forget where you've spent your holiday. Get me ? Now, hop along lively."

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

ST. JOHN'S

THE foreshore on that part of the coast was rocky and broken, and it would have been exceedingly dangerous for anyone not acquainted with it to have attempted a landing there. Frisco, who had the steering oar, evidently was acquainted with it, and he guided the boat through a maze of channels between ugly reefs into a small cove. Here he brusquely ordered the passengers to get out.

In reply to a question from Hill, who wanted to know what province they were in, "This is New Brunswick all right," said Frisco; "part of the Empire what the sun never sets on, so you'll be feeling quite at home. St. John's is a matter o' twenty mile away—you'll walk it before daylight if you strike the road. And just remember what the boss told you—the U-nited States ain't healthy for you."

With which parting injunction Frisco gave the order to push off, and the boat disappeared into the darkness.

Walter and Hill stood staring after it, and continued to do so for some time after it was lost to view. They were free, yet somehow, standing alone on that rocky shore, they neither of them felt so elated as they had expected to do: with every familiar landmark obliterated, their late surroundings at Rachett's Harbour took on quite a homelike and companionable aspect.

Walter was the first to shake himself free of this feeling of helplessness, and to face the facts of the new situation.

"I hope it's the mainland, and not some island they've dumped us on," he said. "I suppose we'd better get to the top of the cliff."

Hill, however, made no move. He seemed quite stunned at finding himself once again on what he considered to be the wrong side of the United States boundary.

"It's rotten luck," commented Walter, "losing that roll of yours; but I don't think they've discovered it. Perhaps you could slip back and get it one night. It won't come to much harm under that floor; made of tin or something, isn't it?"

"Zinc," replied Hill absently; then suddenly he seemed to wake up and gripped Walter by the arm. "Look here," he said, "you help me to get it back and I'll pay you a hundred pounds. It's most valuable, and I'm done for if I lose it."

Walter glanced out to sea, where a white mast-head light, and a green one lower down on a level with the blurred cabin lights, showed the position of a steamer outward bound.

"I want to get back to the *Raglan*," he replied. "That's all that matters to me."

Then he picked up Hill's bag and started off with it towards the cliff-top. By the diffused light of the stars—which was the only light available—they fancied they could discern a track leading inland. They followed it for half a mile, but then came to soft boggy ground, and after trying for some time to get clear of it, they decided to wait for daylight before making any further attempt to find a road.

Sitting down on the lee side of a bush, where the ground was fairly dry, they waited until the first beams of morning in the eastern sky enabled them to choose a course with some degree of certainty. A track of hard ground led to a low hill running parallel with the sea coast; this they crossed, and, in the valley below, saw a small wooden building that was evidently a farmhouse.

"What sort of a tale shall we tell them?" asked Walter.

"Say we're walking to St. John's and got lost."

"That's true in a way, of course; but suppose they ask us where we're from?"

"Goodness knows—I don't. I can't think of the names of any places along this coast. Never mind, leave it to me—I'll do the talking."

Smoke was rising from the farmhouse chimney, and the occupant was getting his morning wash—accompanying himself with a noise as of escaping steam—when Walter and Hill approached the gateway leading into the yard.

"Can we get some breakfast here, and a lift to the nearest railway station?" asked Hill.

The farmer stopped polishing his face with a rough towel. "Maybe you can. I guess you're walking early. Where are you for?"

"We want to get to St. John's."

"Humph. I reckon I can give you some feed, and I'll be driving into St. John's myself afterwards. It'll be a dollar each."

"Right. We'll have a wash if you don't mind."

"Nothing to hinder you. There's a bar o' yaller soap—there's a towel; an' you can draw what water you want from the pump. It's good water;" and with that he turned and went into the house.

"Rum old boy," observed Walter.

"I rather fancy he knows how to mind his own business," said Hill. "Let's hope so anyhow."

A farmhouse breakfast is never to be despised when one is hungry, and as they ate the substantial fare put before them, Hill remarked (their host being out of earshot) that they were getting well served cheap. "By the way," he added, "have you any American or Canadian money?"

Walter shook his head. "Nothing but English," he said.

When the meal was finished the farmer came up to

them, and, with a glance round, apparently to make sure that his meek little wife did not see him, said, "Reckon I'll collect the two dollars now."

Hill opened a pocket-book and drew out an English pound note. "Can you change this?" he asked. "I've run right out of Canadian money."

The man looked at it critically, then crushed it up in his hand. "That'll do all right," he said.

"Hold hard," expostulated Hill; "that equals nearly five dollars."

"Maybe so—maybe so. I minds my own business—I don't ask no questions. 'Tain't a bad policy, not to ask questions, is it, Mister?" There was something in his look that indicated to Hill that he had better rest satisfied with his bargain. Strangers, concerning whom it was wisest not to ask questions, were by no means uncommon in New Brunswick. The Immigration Laws, the Prohibition Law in the States, and the business of smuggling Chinamen and others across the frontier, set up undercurrents in the social life of the province from which someone now and then might derive advantage.

A light buggy drawn by two horses, rather on the heavy side and no doubt more accustomed to the shafts of a wagon, was now brought round by a farm hand. Some baskets of market produce were loaded into it, which left none too much room for three men, but they all managed to pack themselves in. After bumping for some distance along a cart track, they reached some semblance of a road, which presently ran into quite a passable main road; and on this they made good progress. Part of the way they were near a railway line, but saw no trains.

The farmer spoke seldom, except to his horses, and then his words were confined to "Gid-dap." Walter once endeavoured to make conversation by inquiring what sort of land it was thereabouts.

"Fair," growled the man; "peat lands mostly that-a-way"—pointing inland with his whip—"but fairish farming along the coast. Government folks reckon there's minerals under the land 'twixt here and the Point—I wish they'd find some on my land. Farming's hard and dollars don't come easy."

Hill gave Walter a nudge to intimate that he thought enough had been said for the sake of politeness, and that the conversation had better lapse. Lapse it accordingly did, since the farmer made no effort to sustain it.

The cultivated land had now given place to timber. They crossed a bridge at the upper end of a wide estuary, and continued for several miles at a steady trot, which brought them within sight of the tall buildings of St. John's. Here another bridge, spanning the St. John River, had to be crossed, and the road then lay straight to the centre of the town. Not till then did their conductor break silence.

"Whar you wanna get out?"

Hill had been anticipating this question, and had not been able to evolve a satisfactory answer until, on the spur of the moment, an inspiration came to him as he stroked his rough chin.

"Pull up at the first decent hairdresser's—I want to get clean."

The old man's curiosity did not derive much satisfaction from this: a shaving saloon afforded no clue to the business of his passengers. He tried again.

"That's so—you can stand a shave. Do you want your grip taken to the docks?"

"No, thanks; I shall be using it—clean collar and tie, you know."

Seeing that he was not likely to get any information out of Hill, the man gave his horses a cut, and they broke into a fast trot until they were pulled up at a street corner.

" I guess you'll find a saloon that-a-way," he said, pointing to a side turning. Walter and Hill scrambled down, and, with a brief word of thanks, turned away.

St. John's being laid out, in the main, on the American system of town-planning, they had no difficulty in finding their way about. A hairdresser's shop was not far to seek, but they did not go into the first one they came to, continuing on a tour of discovery round several blocks of buildings. At length they stopped before an establishment that seemed to be what they wanted ; but before going in it was necessary that they should have some of the local coinage. Hill gave Walter five pound notes, and asked him to get them changed at the nearest bank.

Walter did so, and returned scratching his head, and with a puzzled look on his face.

" Hope it's all right," he said. " I got twenty-four dollars, eighty. The clerk said a pound is four cents short of five dollars."

" Right oh," replied Hill. " You'd better have five dollars to keep in your pocket, and give me the rest."

Feeling all the fresher for the barber's attentions, Hill said they must now look for a cheap hotel or boarding house. Walter's chief concern, however, was to make inquiries about his ship, and Hill, with some reluctance, agreed that they might perhaps kill two birds with one stone by looking for a decent lodging in the neighbourhood of the docks.

Coming out near a big ferry station, Walter saw a list of shipping arrivals and departures posted up, and eagerly ran his eye over it. The *Raglan* was not amongst the arrivals, but at the bottom of the departure column he found her name. She had sailed the previous night, and under the heading " destination " was the vague word " orders."

Hill was outwardly sympathetic, and suggested that Walter might telephone to the port official whose

name and telephone number were appended to the list. Inwardly he was highly delighted that there was no immediate prospect of his parting company with Walter, for he foresaw that the boy might be extremely useful to him.

A signboard bearing the legend

HOTEL AND BOARDING HOUSE

over a modest-looking restaurant caught his eye.

"Let's try our luck here," he said. "They're sure to have a telephone you can use."

The landlady received them cordially. "Yes, we do a good trade amongst sea-going folk," she said. "I can give you a room with two beds and your food for three dollars a day each, money down."

Hill handed over six dollars, and asked to be shown their room.

"Now we can talk," he said as he closed the door. "You've lost your ship, my lad, and you haven't the money to pay railway fares in chasing her, eh? Well, see if you can get any information over the 'phone; and then remember my offer of a hundred pounds down if you will help me to get that zinc case again."

With little hope of hearing anything to his satisfaction, Walter got through on the telephone to the local port authority.

"Yes, the *Raglan* sailed last night," came the answer to his question, "and the captain reported you were missing. Have you got the motor launch safe?"

"No," replied Walter; "but the captain will understand why."

"Well, I'm to tell you the *Raglan* will probably be in Halifax in ten days' time, and be staying there a week. You'd better hike round and get a job to carry you over."

"Well," said Walter when he returned to their

room, " I'm ready to do what I can for you during the next two weeks if you will guarantee me my fare to Halifax."

Hill pondered for a moment before replying. " Better see the job through and collect the hundred," he said. " If you miss your boat you'll be able to pay for a comfortable trip back to England and rejoin her there."

" No," said Walter firmly ; " two weeks, and my fare to Halifax, please."

" All right, boy ; I'll agree. But we've got to move mighty quick. First of all, I must get some papers or passports of some kind to get across the frontier."

" Are they easy to get ? "

" Far from it. I don't quite know what excuse to invent at the moment to account for you."

" Any chance of slipping back by sea ? "

" I've thought of that. Of course we could sail a suitable boat round, but it's risky, what with fogs and strong tides, and I'm not anxious for any more small boat work just yet. I thought my number was up when I butted the *Rose* into that Dutchman in the English Channel——"

He stopped abruptly as he saw a look of astonishment cross Walter's face. He had taken it for granted that the boy knew of his unlucky adventure with the yacht. Walter, however, had heard nothing of Hill's previous history beyond the fact that he was supposed to be a secret service agent ; and this casual disclosure of Hill's connection with the abandoned *Rose* took him thoroughly by surprise. Then he remembered : Rogers, the owner of the *Rose*, had said that the yacht had been hired by a man named Hill. It was not an uncommon name, and he had forgotten the circumstances until that moment.

But, true to public school tradition, Walter made

no demonstration of strong feeling. "So you were the man who hired out the *Rose*, were you?" he said. "We picked her up, you know, and I took her back to Southampton. Nice little boat—I should have liked a trip in her."

"Yes, she was quite a good boat. I'm glad she wasn't lost."

"I wondered whether your friends in Steepleborough thought you were drowned," went on Walter, with apparent unconcern.

"Steepleborough? I've no friends there," exclaimed Hill, surprised in his turn. "What makes you think I have?"

"Nothing much really; but in Brown's Almanac I found an envelope flap with the name of a Steepleborough bank on it, and I thought you must have put it there."

"Oh, that old Almanac—it was on the yacht when I took her over. I expect the previous occupier left it there, envelope and all."

"Possibly so," answered Walter, not quite convinced. "Of course, I remember now—Rogers said you lived in South-east London."

Hill seemed relieved to hear this, and changed the subject.

"We'll get some food—I fancy there's a meal on—then I'll go out and make some inquiries about passports. You can amuse yourself till supper-time, eh?"

"Yes, I shall be all right," said Walter, without much enthusiasm; upon which Hill, thinking that he was feeling depressed and needed cheering up, added, "Here's a couple of pounds. Go out and change them, and if you want any little thing—you haven't any kit—buy it out of that."

Walter thanked him and pocketed the notes; then they went down together to the dining-room.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

A DISCOVERY AND A DEPARTURE

WALTER changed the two notes, and passed an hour or two in wandering about the streets of St. John's. The shop windows afforded some interest, with their curious local products, and the unfamiliar pricing in dollars and cents. At a book store he tried to buy an English newspaper, but the only English productions to be had were magazines, for which he had no use. He contented himself with a voluminous American journal, in which the headlines, at all events, made entertaining reading, and occupied nearly as much space as the news. With this he returned to the hotel, feeling that a good sleep would not be amiss since he had had none the previous night.

The landlady offered him a cup of tea, and, with the characteristic kindness of colonials to visitors, tried to make him feel at home.

"You'll find the wicker chair there easy," she said, "and maybe there's an English paper in that pile in the corner."

Walter made himself comfortable, and idly turned over the pile of papers, of which there was a miscellaneous assortment, including several French ones, though most of them were of local or American origin. There seemed to be a collection of several months in the corner. Presently a London Sunday paper came uppermost. Walter smiled when he noticed the date: it was that memorable Sunday which he had spent tramping through Gloucestershire after quitting Malmeswick. The news was of little interest to him—politics, a threatened strike, a big law case—it all seemed very remote. On the centre page was an article

about the season's County Cricket prospects, and this he read through; then, turning over, he almost started up out of his chair as his eye caught the headlines:

REMARKABLE BANK ROBBERY AT STEEPLEBOROUGH

CYLINDER CONTAINING ART TREASURES AND £1,000 STOLEN

CASHIER DISAPPEARS

With an eager excitement that caused him to perspire, he read the story which an enterprising "Special Correspondent" had pieced together. It concerned his father's bank; and that the robbery should have taken place on the very night he had run away filled him with an ill-defined sense of dread.

Carefully he re-read the story. No, he was not suspected in connection with it; the missing cashier was evidently the wanted man. But for all that, there was something unaccountably familiar in some of the details. For the moment he had forgotten Hill, but what he read of the stolen cylinder and the missing Treasury notes brought him back to mind with startling vividness. Hill had said that the case he had buried in the hut at Rachett's Harbour was of zinc, and he appeared to be liberally provided with English notes. The newspaper story suggested that the cashier Hutch was making for the Continent: Hill had been picked up from a yacht in mid-Channel; also he recollected that Rogers at Southampton had said that Hill had engaged the yacht prior to the date of the robbery. To crown all, there was the envelope flap with the name of the Steepleborough bank on it!

Walter saw it all in a flash. Hill and the defaulting cashier Hutch were one and the same. What a piece of luck it was that he had never told Hill his real name or any of his personal history!

His first instinct was to rush out and inform the police, and, with that object in view, he grabbed his cap and hurried out into the street. Second thoughts, however, caused him to slow up : who would believe this story ? It was improbable on the face of it, and he had only the envelope flap with which to substantiate it ; moreover, the cylinder was hidden on American territory, and long before action could be taken it might be recovered by Hill, or perhaps discovered by Red Jake.

No, there was only one thing for him to do : he must get back to Rachett's Harbour, and secure the package himself ; then make his way to the nearest English Consul—a sailor's best, though often much abused, friend when abroad.

More self-possessed now that his mind was made up, he started to lay his plans, and his first step was to buy a good map of the district. On this he traced the railways, and found that the C.P.R. line ran down to the St. Croix River, which formed the boundary between New Brunswick and the United States. How he was to get across without a passport he had at present no idea. It was often done, no doubt, and probably when the time came he would find a way. The first thing was to get away from St. John's and as far on his journey as possible before Hill could get on his trail.

Heading up town, he made for the railway depot, keeping a sharp look-out for Hill—by which name he continued to think of him ; then another idea struck him. If he left the town by train, Hill would probably inquire after him at the depot, and quite possibly hear where he had gone. He turned therefore to the left, over the bridge which he had crossed that morning in the farmer's buggy, and walked briskly into the open country. His plan was to join a train at a station some miles out.

This part of the programme he carried out without difficulty. Having found a comfortable seat aboard the train, he dropped off to sleep, and did not wake up until he was aroused by the attendant on reaching St. Stephen's.

"Say, bub, this is where you all gets off de cars. Dis yere train don't go no furder."

It was now dark, and, still more asleep than awake, Walter stumbled from the train and made his way along the small riverside quay. He could see nobody about, and passing a corrugated iron shed, the door of which stood open, he peered inside, and, by the light of a distant arc lamp, saw some bales of straw piled in a corner. He could not do much until daylight, and the opportunity seemed a good one for getting a good rest before starting on the more hazardous stage of the journey. Accordingly, he entered the shed and lay down upon the straw.

The little frontier town lay grey in the early morning light when he awoke and took stock of his surroundings. Nobody seemed astir yet except himself, and he felt much refreshed and eager to push on. There was no telling how soon Hill would be upon his track: even if the defaulting bank cashier could not find any positive clue to his whereabouts, still, St. Stephen's, where there was a bridge across the river to the State of Maine, seemed a most likely point to make for.

Walter was standing just inside the door of the shed, brushing bits of straw from his clothing, when the sound of approaching footsteps and voices came to his ear. Thinking it possible that they belonged to somebody who might be disposed to make trouble over his use of the shed as a bed-room, he drew back behind some cases, and stood perfectly still. The footsteps paused outside the shed, but the voices of two men kept right on.

"Yes, the tariff's come down, and I'm not taking

risks that ain't exactly well paid. Why, Vancouver put two Chinks across last week for fifty dollars—five blinking ten-spots for a job like that, an' got lead sent after him an' all."

"Dollar bills ain't so easy come by," rejoined a second speaker. "Jumping snakes! I've drawn two hundred a head, and put a dozen across in a week."

"So you have, and so have I, and then split it in poker an' hooch. Well, anyhow, I'm through with it. Vancouver's moved his boat up river a matter of twenty miles. He's operating just below the big rapid close to that new saw mill. He won't be there long—them new cops on the Yankee side is——"

Walter heard a low whistle. "We'll be moving," said one of the men, and Walter, from his hiding place, saw them move along the quay. Roughly-dressed workmen they appeared to be, and their conversation did not leave much room for doubt about the kind of work they were engaged on.

Walking slowly towards the end of the township, he came to a rocky foreshore, and sat down to watch the sun find its way through the morning mist, sharpening the outline of the opposite shore of the rapidly-flowing tidal river. That shore was the United States, and that was where he wanted to be. There was a bridge across, but, having no passport, he dared not use it. He must find some other way, and what he had recently overheard proved that there were other ways frequently resorted to.

He returned to the town and found that the day's work had commenced. He entered an eating-house, and sat down at a table in a corner. Several men—quay labourers, perhaps, or other manual workers—were there already, and eating their breakfasts with great gusto.

A serving woman came up to him. "Clam chowder and ham to follow; tea or coffee?" she asked briefly.

"Good enough," replied Walter, trying to appear at ease. "Coffee for mine."

A smoking plateful of some mixture, part shellfish, he thought, and part cod, was placed in front of him, and a huge mug of coffee. Gigantic slices of bread were to hand; and, before he had half finished the fish, a thick rasher of ham, very greasy and very red, had duly arrived. The other frequenters of the place gave him a casual glance, but took no particular notice of him, and the woman who served him did not speak again except to demand payment—fifty cents. Walter handed her a dollar and pocketed the change, and when he had finished his meal he left the shop without further remark.

Once more at the quay-side, he wandered towards the head of the bridge, and read a weather-worn notice setting forth the pains and penalties that would be incurred by any unauthorised person attempting to cross on to American soil. One was liable to be shot at sight, arrested, sentenced to imprisonment, fined, and finally deported as an undesirable. Persons helping anyone else to cross were liable to prosecution—etc., etc.

He passed on, walking briskly to give the impression that he was really going somewhere; he did not want to risk being taken for a loafer. One thing at length became clear to him: there would be little chance of crossing the frontier at that point, and possibly the wisest move would be for him to work his way inland up-stream. He wondered what sort of a man Vancouver was, whose name he had heard mentioned that morning. He would like to get a look at him, though his total capital of English and Canadian money fell woefully short of fifty dollars.

After further consulting his map, he decided to take a road running up-country in a north-westerly direction. When it approached the river, some miles

inland, he would follow the bank, and judge his chances of getting across.

He stared for the last time at St. Stephen's bridge, then resolutely turned away. Once clear of the township, he found that his way lay through a farming area, with well-built houses, mostly of timber, cultivated fields, and carefully tended orchards. The road was rougher than an English country lane, and the dust raised by passing carts and farm wagons had settled on the herbage since the last rain, imparting to it a sort of dull grey bloom. There were plenty of trees, and by mid-day they afforded a welcome protection from the fierce sun.

At a bend in the road he came upon a village store, consisting of a frame house and a galvanised iron hut. The shop windows were small, but they displayed an extensive assortment of groceries, hardware, and provisions ; and there were a number of notices informing the public that the proprietor was agent for agricultural implements and one or two insurance companies, and that Dr. Griggs attended on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Walter thought it a likely, and possibly the only, place where he might obtain a meal.

"Come right in," said the store-keeper heartily, rising from a clumsy stool in the porch where he was sitting whittling away at a piece of stick. The litter of shavings about his feet suggested that he had spent a considerable time that way. "Missus, give this young fellow something for eats."

Cold ham, some nearly cold potatoes, and wedge of gooseberry pie, more crust than fruit and rather tough crust at that, were set out in the porch ; and while Walter ate, the proprietor seated himself near by and, using a splinter of wood as a toothpick, talked.

"Going far ? Don't know yet, eh ? Well, there's

work to be had on some of the farms round hereabouts."

Walter tried to answer without committing himself to anything very definite, and he did not find it any too easy.

"Just walking round like?" his interlocutor went on. "Maybe you're walking to British Columbia?"

Walter laughed. "Some walk that, what?—right across Canada!"

"Well, 'tain't none o' my business. Anyhow, you're on the right track. Popular place, British Columbia."

When the meal was ended Walter paid up, and bought some biscuits and cheese to take along with him. The store-keeper seemed greatly tickled by his British Columbia joke, and worked it off several times before he and his customer parted company.

With his pockets well filled, Walter continued on his way. Some half a mile past the store a lane branched off on the left. He could not trace it on the map, but he fancied it led in the direction of the river bank, and might therefore be worth exploring. It led first to a small homestead, beyond which it lost its importance as a thoroughfare, and became no more than a grass-grown cart track.

Wondering whether he might not, after all, be wasting time in coming that way at all, Walter still kept on. The path led across a tract where timber had been extensively felled, the ground being dotted with stumps. Farther on the trees were still standing—tall, straight spruce firs; and beyond this again, Walter came at length to the rocky bank of the St. Croix River.

Climbing a small hillock, which projected like a cape into the rushing stream, he sat down and surveyed the scene. The river was much narrower here than at St. Stephen's, and decidedly more turbulent.

It was, in fact, something of a small rapid flowing over an uneven bed, and the surface was covered with swirling waves and eddies. Nothing but a Canadian canoe in skilled hands could have navigated it, while to swim it was utterly out of the question. Down-stream, on the American side, a water-power saw-mill was in course of erection, and this was the only sign of business activity. Up-stream, on the Canadian side, the woods came down to the water's edge. At that point the river broadened out, and Walter imagined that the water was quieter. He determined to make sure, and, clambering along the uneven bank, progressed slowly for about half a mile. Here he found his surmise to be correct : the river was now smooth, though still running fast—too fast for anyone to swim it, and that, he was beginning to think, was his only hope of getting across.

Tired after his long walk, he looked about for a spot where he might lie down and rest. Not far away on the river bank, just clear of the trees, was a patch of bushes. He made for it, and found that there was an open grassy space in the middle of it where he would be screened from observation ; for though he had not seen a living soul since leaving the store, he felt it advisable to keep out of sight as much as possible.

He threw himself down and stretched his limbs, and for a few minutes lay still ; then, on rolling over to get into a more comfortable position, he caught sight of something that caused him to sit up. Drawn up in a tiny inlet in the bank, and hidden from the sight of any casual passer-by by the surrounding bushes, was a small boat. Immediately Walter scrambled up and went towards it, brushing his way noisily through the wiry growth.

It was certainly a boat, roughly built, and without oars or thole pins, though there were holes in the gun-wale into which the latter could be inserted. He

searched about in the bank in the hope of coming across the oars, but did not find any ; so he sat down beside the boat and meditated on what possible use he could make of it.

He must devise some kind of oar or paddle—and that would be no easy job with no tool but his sailor's knife. If it came to the worst he might be able to make shift with one of the floor-boards. At any rate, he could do nothing till darkness fell, and that would not be for some hours yet. Gradually the heat of the sun and the exertions of the morning induced a sensation of drowsiness. Well, he might as well get a sleep now, and be fresh when the time for action should arrive.

He lay down on the ground once again, and slept on this time, undisturbed by the sounds produced all round him by birds and small animals, which, after regarding him with timidity and suspicion, and finding that he took no notice of them, continued their normal avocations, indifferent to his presence.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

ON THE FRONTIER

THE sun was setting behind the pines when a man with a grizzled beard, well past middle age but still wiry and hale, pushed his way through the bushes, and almost stumbled over Walter's recumbent form. He stared for a minute in silence ; then, " Well, I'll be goldarned ! " he ejaculated, and stirred Walter into wakefulness with the toe of his boot. " Say, young feller, what're you doing here anyway ? "

Walter sat up with no clear recollection of where

he was. The knowledge, however, very soon came back to him, and put him on his guard.

"Good evening—fine evening, isn't it?" he remarked pleasantly, trying to form some idea of what sort of a man his questioner might be.

"I'll allow the evening'll pass, an' we've been havin' a spell of fine weather; but say now, what are you after?"

"Nothing much," replied Walter. "I just fancied to walk this way and felt tired. I guess I've been asleep."

"You've been asleep all right, but I reckon you didn't come here to admire the scenery. Whar you making for?"

The rather feeble joke, as it had seemed to him, of the storekeeper came into Walter's mind, and he replied off-handedly, "Oh, British Columbia!"

But the effect of this pleasantry on the man was quite different from what Walter had expected. He started, and gave the boy a searching look.

"So you're in the know, are you? Well, you're sure on the right trail. Got the dollars on you?"

Instantly the whole thing became clear to Walter. "British Columbia" was evidently a sort of password or slang term understood by the people who had business of a certain kind along the river. Then the conversation he had overheard on St. Stephen's quay that morning came back to him, and he asked, "Is your name Vancouver?"

"Wal, I'll allow I answer to it when it suits me. Anyhow, Vancouver's the big shout in British Columbia—savvy?—an' I've got the say-so hereabouts."

"Can you help me to cross over?" asked Walter, nodding his head in the direction of the American shore.

"The tariff's fifty dollars," replied Vancouver, "an' I undertakes to plant you ten mile inland for it."

Walter shook his head despondently. "I can't run to it. I'm aiming to get over to the Maine coast for a day or two, and I've only a few dollars on me."

But Vancouver declined, in forcible terms, to be drawn from the strict line of business. "Wal, I want to know," he exclaimed; "an' someone must ha' been a blamed idiot to send you on here without the bills to pay your footing. Jumping snakes! I want to know!"

Walter thought it might ease the old man's mind if he told him how he had come by the information.

"No one intentionally gave the game away, Vancouver. I just heard it mentioned, quite accidentally, that you'd moved twenty miles up-stream——"

"I guess I've got a date to move again now," interposed Vancouver.

"—and the store-keeper away back a bit joked me about walking to British Columbia. I didn't know what he meant, but I guessed it all when you spoke."

"Say now, for a Britisher—you are a Britisher, I'll swear—for a Britisher you're right smart. Now, come across with the truth. What's your game?"

Walter hesitated. "I don't mind telling you," he said, "if you'll promise to help me across, but it will sound a queer yarn to you."

"I guess I'll judge that, and maybe make a proposition. Anything to do with bootlegging?"

"No, nothing at all."

"That's good. They've ruined this trade by crowding hereabouts. Yon banks are lined with Yankee look-outs thick as posts in wire fencing."

"It's just this," said Walter. "I've found out that some important papers belonging to my father have been stolen, and are hidden in a hut over in Maine. I want to make a shot at getting them; and I daresay if I'm successful I may be able to send you more than your usual fare for the trip."

Vancouver stared hard at him for some minutes.

" Son, that yarn strikes me as being too clumsy to be a lie," he said. " I'll allow you're not telling me the two ends and middle of it, but I calculate, if you were lying, you'd make a better fist at it."

He paused, then tapped his hand on his knee and continued, " Maybe I could get you across, but I'm here to tell you it's a risk. Them Yanks don't hesitate to shoot, like our fellows do."

" What, have we patrols this side, same as the Americans ? " asked Walter. " I've not seen any."

Vancouver laughed. " It's sorter this way. We ain't so fussy like about folk coming over here, likewise most of the trade runs t'other way. The last bloke from the States I helped over was a bank manager, an' when I heard he'd been robbing people in a little one-hoss town out West—well, they cotched him ; " and he laughed grimly.

This reference to someone connected with a bank made Walter uneasy, and he was glad he had not said more than was necessary about his own affairs ; but it also led him to think that this old smuggler of human beings had a code of honour of his own, and was to some extent to be trusted.

" No, I don't suppose the patrol looked for you," went on Vancouver, " or bothered much if he saw you here asleep. There ain't no Dominion law as I knows on agin a man havin' a nap on a summer's afternoon round these here parts no more'n anywheres else."

" Well, what do you say about helping me over ? " asked Walter, seeing that the old man was in no hurry to come to his " proposition."

" I won't say as I'll exactly help you," replied Vancouver, " but maybe I'll put you in the way of a chance."

He disappeared into the bushes, and presently returned with a pair of oars and thole pins.

"Jump in," he said; "you can row, I reckon."

Walter obeyed with alacrity, and as the old man seated himself in the stern, he swung the boat out into the river.

"Keep her close to the bank, out of the stream," said Vancouver. "We ain't aiming to cross yet-a-ways."

Somewhat surprised at this, but thinking that probably the old man had a good reason for it, Walter did as he was told, and, rowing against a current which ran a good two knots even in-shore, he made slow and steady progress up the river.

At the end of half an hour Vancouver directed him to pull in amongst another clump of bushes, and then got out.

"You stay here," he said. "I'll send you some coffee down. You'll get your wind after a rest. 'Tain't no use trying to make a run over now on your own—they're watching you close over there. I'll tell you when to start."

To Walter the whole proceeding seemed curious, but not more so, he reflected, than the nature of his errand. It was now almost dark, and bright stars dotted the sky. Presently the moon would rise—and possibly that was what Vancouver was waiting for.

Walter settled himself down as comfortably as he could in the boat, and hoped that he would not have to sit there all night.

Some time elapsed before he heard the sound of someone coming; then the bushes parted, and a voice he had not heard before spoke to him.

"Ze boss he send you zis café—good café. Big François make him; and ze pie good—oh, verra good!"

Walter accepted the food willingly enough, and expressed his thanks to the burly French-Canadian, who, he afterwards learned, had a strain of Indian blood in him.

"Boss say you wait one hour—savvy?—an' den

row straight across. Land under ze big bluff "—he pointed to a high bank on the opposite shore. "Ze boat you moost aim up river plenty, or ze stream carry you away too mooch—comprenez?"

"Yes, I think I understand," replied Walter; "but I haven't a watch, and I'm afraid I'm a bad judge of time. How am I to know when the hour's up?"

Big François took this in slowly. "Look zat bright star," he said, pointing to Jupiter, shining clearly above the tree-tops. "When him reach ze tall trees, zat ze right time; you go."

This was clear enough. "All right," said Walter; and the big man gave an almost girlish laugh and disappeared, crying "Bon voyage!"

Left to himself, Walter watched the planet, which moved, if it moved at all, with majestic deliberation very trying to the patience of the watcher, however becoming it might be in a heavenly body. Meanwhile he wondered why Vancouver, a perfect stranger to him, after first refusing to assist him, should suddenly be willing to provide him with a boat, and that without payment. Was it just a passing fad or fancy, or was there a motive behind it? Probably the latter, thought Walter. Perhaps at the last moment someone else would join him, and he would have to work his passage while Vancouver recouped himself handsomely from the other passenger. This seemed the most likely explanation at the time, and Walter felt bound to honour the contract.

Slowly the star drew towards the tall trees until it seemed almost to be touching them as they stood outlined against the dark, steel-blue sky. At last it definitely disappeared, and, as no one else had arrived, Walter decided to start. Casting off the long painter that held it to the shore, he pushed the boat out into the open river, and, heading at an angle of about forty-five degrees up-stream, he rowed lustily away.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

INVADING THE UNITED STATES

IT was well for Walter's peace of mind that he was unaware of Vancouver's real reason for assisting him to make his own way across the St. Croix River to American soil. It was not the outcome of benevolence, for Vancouver's relations with his passengers were strictly cash. The truth was that Walter's appearance fitted in very well with his own arrangements ; he purposed to use the boy as a decoy, at a part of the river where he would stand a very good chance of being captured by the American patrols, while he himself, at a more favourable point lower down, personally superintended the ferrying across of three other passengers, who were paying him well for doing so.

Of set purpose, therefore, he directed Walter to start off at a point where the stream was by no means at its slackest, with the consequence that he had to row energetically, heedless of whether the splash of the oars and creaking of the thole pins should be heard as he neared the opposite shore.

Vancouver calculated that Walter would be seen, and that the patrols would be called into the area where he was likely to land. Then he would be taken prisoner ; or perhaps would cause a further diversion by attempting to row away again ; in which event he would probably be fired on, and that would result in the attention of the patrols being directed to that one point and away from Vancouver. It was an ingenious scheme, and bore every promise of success.

Walter found that rowing across the river was a longer job than he had expected. From the Canadian side he had thought that ten minutes would see him

across ; but he estimated that he had been rowing for a solid quarter of an hour when he turned for a moment to survey his position. There was still a considerable distance to go, but he noted with satisfaction that he had not been set down-stream.

At length the high bank for which he was heading appeared on his port hand, black and steep-to. He stopped rowing for an instant and listened intently. Except for the ripple of the water, not a sound was to be heard. The boat was now out of the main stream, and the downward drift was but slight.

Pulling as quietly as the clumsy oars and his tired arms permitted, he edged in-shore ; still there was no sound. A small bay opened out, the edge of which was clear of brushwood, and that seemed to him to be a good place to land, for if he were challenged he would then have a clear line of retreat ; whereas if he got amongst bushes and small trees, he might run right into the arms of a hidden patrol.

Presently the boat grated on gravel, and he stepped gently overboard. He strained his eyes to pierce the darkness, but apparently the coast was clear, so he drew the boat up a little way, then ran swiftly to cover. Coming to a grassy bank, he dropped on to his hands and knees and crawled up. When he reached the top he glanced back, and saw, not without some misgiving, that the boat had floated off and was drifting down-stream. For fear of making a noise, he had failed to ground her sufficiently. There was nothing for it now but to go forward, since his retreat was cut off.

Between the top of the bluff and the timber (which from the opposite shore had appeared to line the bank) was a stretch of grass. Walter's first impulse was to make a dash across it, but on second thoughts he decided to keep on crawling lest his figure should show up against the sky-line. Naturally his progress on all fours was slow, but at any rate it was silent.

Once, indeed, his knee pressed on a thin dry branch, which cracked beneath his weight and set his nerves in a flutter. It seemed to him that the noise must be heard for miles round, though actually it was not much louder than the sounds made by many a small forest animal on its nightly prowl.

He held his breath for a moment and listened, but could hear nothing. He remembered reading somewhere that Indians often put their ears to the ground to catch the sound of distant footfalls. He tried it, but still heard nothing, and so, with increasing confidence, he went ahead again.

Just as he reached the edge of the grass he received another shock : two reports of rifles rang out through the stillness of the night, then a third, and presently he heard loud shouts.

Vancouver's scheme had miscarried. Someone had warned the American patrols to expect a boat containing at least four men ; consequently, when the small boat with only Walter and the old man in it had been seen early in the evening, the patrols judged it to be a bluff ; and knowing that the likeliest place for crossing on that section of the river was a good half-mile below, they had concentrated there in readiness.

As soon as Walter realised that the shooting was not aimed at him, he jumped to his feet and ran to the trees ; then, taking care to avoid treading on dead branches, he walked on rapidly over a carpet of pine needles. The moon, in its last quarter, was rising over on the Canadian side, and, with it behind him, he kept a fairly straight course.

The firs presently gave way to clear country. Keeping straight ahead, he soon struck a lane, which led eventually to a definite road, and a small village appeared in front, silent and deserted. He hastened through it, to find himself at a cross-road, where a sign-post, dimly visible in the early dawn, pointed to the

left to Princeton. This place, as he knew from his map, was too near the frontier to be safe, so he kept straight on through a tract of wild country, with here and there a small farm, but mostly uncultivated, and watered by many small, rapidly-flowing streams.

He ate his biscuits and cheese, washing them down with water, icy cold, from a little fall by the roadside ; then he took another look at the map of New Brunswick, which included a small-scale map of Maine, chiefly to show the railway connections. Later he hoped to be able to buy a local map on which he could identify the position of Rachett's Harbour.

A mile or so farther on he came upon a man loading sacks of grain on to a small motor-lorry. He stopped as Walter drew near, and wiped the perspiration from his brow with the back of his hand.

" Warm work," he observed genially.

" I guess it's that," replied Walter, adopting a slight nasal drawl that he hoped did not sound too obviously assumed for the occasion.

" If it isn't, I want to know," laughed the other. " Going far ? "

Walter remembered seeing a place named Bangor on the map, and replied, " Bangor for now."

" Say, you're never hitting the road on foot that much ? Aren't a blamed hobo, are you ? "

" Not a bit. I've a dollar or two for car fares when I strike the line."

" Hough! Well, give me a hand loading these sacks, an' I'll run you in to Lincoln. You'll be there in time for the local."

In his present state Walter considered the offer too good to be refused, and he entered the yard to help. The sacks were heavy, and the sacking tore his nails painfully, but he worked on until the loading was completed, and then, thoroughly fatigued, he climbed up beside the driver.

For the first part of the journey the man kept up an uninterrupted flow of talk, holding forth on the prospects of money-making in Maine. Farming, mixed ranching, logging—all seemed to interest him equally ; but after a run of ten miles or so the stream showed signs of slackening, and he gave Walter an opportunity of taking a hand.

" Been working on a job Princeton way, maybe ? "

" Ay, over that way."

" Job finished now like ? "

" Yes, I've been paid off."

" Where are you heading now ? "

" I've a fancy to make for the coast. I've heard I can find something there."

" Not much doing in fishing till the fall anyhow."

Pause ; then, " Was you working for a Yank or a foreigner ? "

" For a Britisher—a newcomer ; in fact, I was paid partly in English notes and some Canadian dollars."

Another pause, during which the man eyed Walter with suspicion and growing disfavour. At length he said, " I reckon I'd be in mighty fine trouble if you've come here unbeknown, and I guess I'll have to ask you to drop off hereabouts."

Walter had mentioned his money deliberately in the hope of getting some of it changed.

" Well, you aren't exactly carrying out your share of the bargain," he said. " Anyhow, will you do me a turn in another way ? "

" Sorter depends what way."

" Change a bit of my money for American dollar bills."

The man took some time to think this out ; and it seemed that the suggestion that he was not keeping his word had taken him in a weak spot.

" The police don't happen to want you, do they ? "

" No ; I swear honest they don't."

"Right; I'll risk swopping ten dollars, and you get out here."

The money was duly changed, and once more Walter took the road. It was a relief to have some of the local currency in his pocket, and to find himself some miles on his way; still, he hoped he was not going to encounter the same attitude of suspicion wherever he went.

The name of Lincoln now began to appear on the signposts, and he pressed on. The weather turned cloudy, for which he was thankful, for the full blaze of the sun would have made the journey exceedingly tiring.

At last the little township came into sight, and Walter headed for the railway depot. Entering the booking office, he asked the time of the next train for Bangor.

"Due here in half an hour, bub," was the reply.

Half an hour would give him time to get something to eat. He crossed the road to some shops, and went into one that appeared to have been a saloon, but was now selling tea and "soft" drinks. Inside, a long counter was covered with dishes of sandwiches, small pies, cakes, and fruit, and a large electro-plated sort of geyser was hissing, ready to supply hot water.

As he approached the counter an attendant pushed a plate and fork towards him, with the inquiry, "Tea, coffee, or something soft?"

"Tea, please," replied Walter, and, concluding that he was to help himself to the eatables, he took two pies, two sandwiches, and an apple. The attendant passed over a large-sized cup of tea, and, reckoning up at a glance what was on Walter's plate, said, "Forty," gathered up the dollar bill offered him, paid it into a cash register, and handed back the change.

Walter ate this nondescript sort of meal hurriedly, then went back to the depot and secured a paper slip ticket to Bangor. A number of other people were wait-

ing for the train on the low platform. It arrived presently, with much rattle and clatter, the locomotive looking, to anyone used only to the smooth design and clean lines of those on British railways, an exceedingly complicated mass of machinery.

"Bangor train—git aboard there, git aboard!"

Walter got aboard, and followed the crowd into a large day car already nearly full. He found a seat towards the rear, behind some men whom he presently discovered from their conversation to be "drummers," or commercial travellers. A boy in uniform came down the centre of the car selling pea-nuts, chocolate, and newspapers. Walter bought a copy of the *Bangor Eagle and East Maine Monitor*. It appeared to be modelled on the pattern of the big city journals, and on the front page enormous headlines announced that "Senator Hancock says Why—Lumber-Jacks Don't like It." Had Walter looked through the paper more carefully he would have found on an inner page a highly-coloured account of Vancouver's attempt to run the frontier, but he felt drowsy, and what he did read had no particular interest for him.

The two travellers seated in front of him were discussing journeys and hotels, quoting many New England names that had a familiar ring to an Englishman —Belfast, Bangor, Dover, Newport, Milford, Bath and Bristol. "I'm getting out at Belfast to-morrow," remarked one: "they're running that packet to Rockland, and it's the best dollar trip on my journey; saves three hours, and I'm two dollars in on my expenses."

Walter made a mental note of this scrap of information. He remembered noticing Rockland on the map as the terminal station of a branch railway running inland from the point on the coast where he thought Rachett's Harbour to lie; also that there was no railway connection between Belfast and Rockland except by making a wide detour.

He continued to doze and wake up at intervals until the train pulled into the busy junction of Bangor. Here he alighted, and walked out into the main street of the town. He was rather at a loss which way to turn, feeling very much of a stranger in a strange land —and not without reason, since he had no legal right to be there at all, and every policeman he met was a potential enemy. But a potential enemy may be a very good friend until hostilities begin ; and it was while Walter was standing at a busy street corner below the station, gazing round in a dazed sort of way, that he heard himself addressed in gruff tones by an officer of the law.

" Wal, bub, what are you looking for ? Ain't lost your mammy ? "

The light of a bright lamp overhead showed a broad smile upon an unmistakably Irish face. Walter grinned back.

" I want a hotel—clean and cheap. Perhaps you know of one ? "

The policeman did. " Go right down there," he said, " and take the second to your right, past the big movie palace. The name's Molony—not Mal-o-nez, which is Frenchy for a bad nose."

" Thanks, officer, I'll go right now."

" Say Officer Casey sent you, and you'll get in."

He found Molony's Eating House and Boarding Establishment, paid his money in advance, as he had no luggage as security, ate a fish supper, and was soon asleep in a clean bed.

The next morning he was awakened by a loud hammering on his door, and a voice shouting, " Are you sleeping all day ? It's half after eight."

When he left the hotel he found that his pocket was getting light, and he decided that he must change some of his few remaining English pound notes. After considering the risk he was likely to run if he

attempted to do so in a shop, he made up his mind to go boldly into a bank, where a notice in the window announced that foreign money was changed.

He entered the almost palatial building, which was thronged with customers at that hour of the day. A long table divided by partitions, like the telegram desks in a British post-office, ran along one wall, and in racks were forms to be filled in for various purposes. A set of blue forms was headed " Money Exchange," and examining one of these, he found that it was a very simple matter to fill it in, with particulars of the notes or coinage " in " on the one side, and the kind of money wanted " out " on the other. At the bottom was a line for a signature and a date.

Walter hesitated on reaching this point, then decided to sign his proper name, since, in the event of trouble, the papers in his pocket would show that he was so far acting honestly.

At the counter he handed in the three notes he wished to change, together with the blue slip.

" Rate's four seventy-one to-day—fourteen dollars, thirteen cents."

Walter's hand trembled as he picked up the money from the counter, and he had to check an inclination to run out of the building. He had fully expected to be asked questions, and to be served as a matter of course almost unnerved him. But the reflection that it was the normal function of a bank to transact money business, and that the people around him were engaged on their own private affairs and were not worrying about him, brought a greater measure of self-assurance. In that spirit he afterwards went into a store and bought a check shirt and a straw hat, which would, he thought, give him more of the appearance of a farm hand. He found an opportunity for changing into them at the railway depot while waiting for the train for Belfast.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

RACHETT'S HARBOUR AGAIN

IN the main street of Belfast a tall, weedy-looking youth was leaning up against a post. He took a straw from between his lips when Walter went up to him and asked to be directed to the Rockland packet.

"Sure thing, kid," he said. "You ain't no baggage to hike? No; well, my services as a guide would be a quarter; so chase it down that thoroughfare on your lonesome, and you'll hit salt water where she's lying."

At the bottom of the street indicated Walter found the steamer lying at a wharf, and read a placard announcing its forthcoming departure and particulars of fares—Deck 75 cents, Saloon 1.25. He booked a deck-passage, and, with a brown-paper parcel containing his jersey and seaman's cap under his arm, strolled for'ard to watch the *Atlantic Belle* cast off. The skipper sang out a few crisp orders, pulled the cord of a wheezy syren, clanged the engine-room telegraph, and the voyage began.

Finding a seat, Walter turned to the study of the map of the district which he had purchased that morning. Among the multitude of inlets and islands on the Maine coast he had some difficulty in identifying Rachett's Harbour. He picked out what he thought must be the right place, but as the map was intended for the use of motorists and confined itself principally to roads, the name of this particular creek was not given. However, as it fell out, the problem was solved for him in another way. Amongst the miscellaneous assortment of cases and sacks with which the foredeck was cluttered up, Walter noticed some old fish tubs with the label, "Return empty to Golden Sun-

rise Fish Canning and Curing Corporation, Pesquoid Station."

Pesquoid Station was on the map at the head of the creek he had fixed on as his destination.

When the voyage had lasted an hour or so a gong was sounded and dinner announced. It cost as much as the fare, but Walter considered it a wise investment, since he did not know when or where he would get his next square meal. He ate this one in such comfort as the faded saloon of the *Atlantic Belle* afforded, and congratulated himself on the progress he was making.

And at the same time, away back in St. John's, Hill, or Hutch, had just awakened to the true significance of his late companion's disappearance. When, on returning to the boarding house, he had first missed him, he had taken it for granted that Walter had found some means of getting to Halifax, and had seized the chance without stopping to explain. This had annoyed him, but he had resigned himself to it, for he had come across a man in the town who had promised, for a consideration, to obtain, by some means known to himself, the necessary papers that would enable him—Hutch—to enter the United States. He was sitting, therefore, in the boarding house in an easy frame of mind, planning how best to get to Rachett's Harbour and secure his cylinder, when he casually picked up the English newspaper which Walter had left lying on the top of the pile in the corner.

As soon as he saw the report of the affair at Steepleborough he guessed what had happened, and a word with the landlady confirmed it. Walter had been seated in that chair looking at the papers just before he went out, and he had gone suddenly without saying where he was going or when he would be back. Hutch did not doubt for a moment that Walter had gone to get possession of the cylinder, and he at once set about making preparations to start in pursuit.

The *Atlantic Belle*, due at Rockland at 3 p.m., made excellent time, being only half an hour late ; but, as a deck-hand roust-about explained, the wind and tide had helped her, or she " wouldn't have butted up against the wharf till supper time."

A train was due to leave two hours later which would call at Pesquoid station. Walter hoped that, with the slight changes he had made in his personal appearance, he would not be immediately recognised if he encountered any of the employees of the Golden Sunrise Fish Canning and Curing Corporation. He was getting used to the American railway system, and did not anticipate any difficulty in slipping unnoticed out of the depot at Pesquoid. After an easy day, with plenty of rest on the train and steamboat, he would tackle the walk to Rachett's Harbour at once, and spy out the land.

" Say, I guess this train's got nothing on the *Atlantic Belle*," jeered a passenger, as, losing time at every advertised halt as well as at several not in the schedule, they crawled slowly westward. The delay did not worry Walter—he rather fancied it was to his advantage.

At last, however, the conductor shouted, " Next stop Pesquoid ; " and when the train drew up, Walter slipped off the car behind the only two other passengers alighting there. The three front cars contained goods and heavy baggage, and towards these the station staff of one man, and the local loafers, whose chief interest in life was watching the arrival and departure of the trains, turned their attention.

Outside the wooden shanty a car was waiting for the two passengers, who at once drove off, leaving the open space deserted except for one decrepit vehicle, which, having once been seen, could scarcely fail to be recognised a second time. It was the lorry belonging to the Golden Sunrise Fish Canning and Curing

Corporation. Walter guessed at once what was afoot. Another load of fish and smuggled spirits was being despatched by the train he had just alighted from.

He stared at the car, then took a hurried glance at the train, where attention was still concentrated on the loading up. It flashed into his mind that if he could stow himself aboard he might be carried right inside the stockade at Rachett's Harbour. It was running a risk, but he had noticed, when he had been shut up there, that the driver simply left the car to take care of itself when once it was in the yard, and he thought the odds were in his favour. If he should be discovered, then he must throw himself on the mercy of Red Jake, and try to win his sympathy by telling him the whole story.

Scrambling into the interior of the car, he pulled some old and evil-smelling sacks over him, and waited. He heard the train go off, and presently the driver of the car strolled leisurely over and attempted to crank up. When the engine failed to start at the first turn, he used language as strong as the cargo he had been recently carrying—and which he had apparently been sampling.

To Walter it was an unforgettable ride. The bare frame-work of the under body bumped him painfully and continuously. He tried to ease matters by using his parcel as a pad, but that merely had the effect of transferring the agony to another sensitive part. But all things come to an end, and after an hour or so of the most uncomfortable travelling he had ever experienced, the car ran into the now familiar yard, and was parked under an open shed, the driver, as he dismounted, expressing his opinion of her to Red Jake.

"Say, boss, if the profits on this show don't work out to a new flivver, it's me for another job pronto, likewise smart."

" Aw, shut your head an' chase your supper. You're an hour late."

" I should say so. The engineer let his old cow-pusher go off the boil, an' fetched the depot one an' a half behind skedule."

" Cut out the rough stuff an' beat it."

The driver " beat it " to the hut and disappeared, followed by Red Jake. Walter waited until the coast was clear, then crept out of the car.

" By Jove! I'd have been less tired if I'd walked it," he said to himself, rubbing the more ill-used parts of his anatomy. " Now to find another hiding place."

A pile of fish boxes and tubs was stacked in one corner, behind which there was sufficient room for him to conceal himself; so, dragging a sack from the car, he settled down for another tedious wait. After the excitement of the journey and lack of regular sleep, he felt drowsy, and, though he fought against it, he found himself more than once on the point of dozing off, only to wake up with a start, generally at the sound of laughter from the hut. Once it seemed that his chances of remaining undiscovered were not worth much. The motor driver, accompanied by another man, came back to the car to look for a packet of cigarettes. He was talking in a dismal tone of voice about some forthcoming project of Red Jake's; but his fears were not shared by his companion, who laughed derisively.

" Jake's trying to scrape varnish and not touch paint. It's blame near pirating, an' he'll butt up agin it, you hear me."

" Aw, yer can't teach him how far to go. He knows salt-water law backwards, an' he's got dollars enough to buy shore-going law what'll prove it."

" Sure thing he knows law, an' he's got a pull in Portland, but it's too sultry for me. Honest boot-eggin's popular, but steamer hold-ups ain't. Frisco

calculates we ain't heard the last o' that *Gretchen* job —he reckons that red-headed kid put it over Jake with his smooth talk."

"Take some kid to put it across Jake, by heck it would. Come on if you've got your smokes. The crowd'll be going aboard in a couple of hours; the launch is at the jetty."

"I'm sure glad I ain't driving the blame thing—never know how far you're going, nor when you're coming home. Shore work for mine, kid."

The men moved off, but their conversation gave Walter something to think about, and a wild scheme came into his mind. It was now getting dark, and he decided to risk slipping across to the hut where he had been shut up. This was not difficult, but before he went in he peeped through the window of the adjoining hut. A large oil lamp was burning on the desk, close to Red Jake's feet as he reclined in his favourite attitude. Scattered round the room were a dozen or more men, whose features could hardly be distinguished through the dense clouds of tobacco smoke.

Red Jake had evidently been issuing some instructions. "Now, boys," he wound up, "one more drink and we get a move on. If we're lucky, we'll be back this time to-morrow night, and I calculate we'll have something better worth splitting than cod-fish. Put 'em up, Frisco."

Walter darted to the barred door and lifted the wooden beam. A burst of laughter drowned the creak it made, and he slipped inside. Their old sack bedding was still where they had left it—evidently no one had troubled to clear the place up—and it served as a guide in the darkness.

To shift the bedding and raise the broken plank was the work of a moment. He grasped the precious cylinder, and, in his excitement, ran with it out of the hut and across to the stockade gate without even

looking to see if the way was clear. Fortunately it was. Grabbing at the cross-bars, he scrambled up, the zinc cylinder, which he thrust as far as it would go into his side-pocket so that his hands might be free, thudding noisily against the timber.

He stood for a few seconds on the cross-bar that secured the gate and faced the more difficult task of climbing over the pointed top. He raised himself carefully, and was in a position that would have come much more naturally to a cat, both hands and feet gripping the top of the stockade, when the cylinder fell from his pocket, and rattled noisily on the stones outside.

"That's done it," muttered Walter, and lowered his body over the stockade until he was at full stretch; then he let go with his hands, and dropped the ten feet to the ground. He landed awkwardly, giving his ankle a nasty wrench; then he retrieved the cylinder and ran for the jetty.

Both the *Rattlesnake* and the *Raglan's* launch lay there, and seated on a pile-end, which acted as a bollard, was a watchman.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

MAKING A DASH FOR IT

THE bootleggers were on the point of coming out of their hut when Walter surmounted the stockade and prepared to drop over.

"Look out, boys," cried one, hearing the fall of the cylinder on the stones, "someone's been spying on us."

"What!" yelled Jake.

"I heard someone at the gate, and a tin rattled."

Instantly there was a rush towards the gate. The men seized the cross-bar and tried to raise it, but Walter's weight, when he had stood on it, had wedged it in its catches.

"Hit it, you blame idiots. Get out of it—bear a hand—now then—sling that post and hit it."

In the dark they fumbled and got in one another's way; there was a babel of oaths and adjurations, in the midst of which, from the direction of the jetty, came the sound of a heavy splash and a call for help.

"That's Simpson howling. Oh, gosh! hit it square, Frisco, you bonehead! It's pirates or cops." Red Jake stormed on until Frisco dislodged the cross-bar with a blow from a heavy post, the gates were thrown open, and the men poured out.

Walter was close upon the watchman before he saw him; and the man, hearing the sound of footsteps hurriedly approaching, jumped up and tried to grab him. But Walter had played Rugger at Malmeswick, and now, swerving to one side, he struck out with his arm and sent the man spinning towards the edge of the jetty, whence he took an involuntary dive into the water.

For an instant Walter hesitated which of the two launches he should take—the *Raglan's*, which he knew, or the *Rattlesnake*, which was faster. The watchman's cries for help, and the answering yells from the stockade, brought him to a quick decision: he took the larger and more speedy vessel. His careful inspection of her during his swimming excursion had shown him where to find her controls, and before the pursuers had got the gate open he had cast off, and was fumbling in the darkness to start an engine. Moving the ignition-lever and the petrol gas control almost by guess, he swung the starting handle of the port engine, while the boat drifted with the tide clear of the jetty.

INSTANTLY THERE WAS A RUSH TOWARDS THE GATE.

The bootleggers came into view just as the engine fired. With throttle and ignition fully extended, the launch began to make speed, bearing away at once to starboard. Walter put the helm over and tried to steady her; then, holding the wheel with one hand, he felt for the controls of the other engine.

Crack—crack—crack! Three revolver shots came whizzing over his head. The noise of the other launch being started up behind him caused him to let go the wheel, and try to swing the starboard engine. Once, twice, three times he pulled it over, while the *Rattlesnake* ran wild and began to circle. A fourth desperate tug, and it started; then a dark object loomed up ahead: he was running into the *Flyaway*, which was lying at her usual anchorage. Those of her crew who were still aboard had been aroused by the sound of the firing, and were on the alert. He put his helm hard over again and just grazed past the schooner, but the next instant had collided with a small boat under her stern.

Another fusillade of shots followed, and shouts came from the deck of the *Flyaway*.

"Shoot, boys; shoot lively, now. Someone's pinching the *Rattlesnake*!"

A thud and a rattle in the after part of the launch indicated that one or more shots had taken effect, but Walter was not hit. Crouching low at the wheel, he fixed his eyes on a star, which he calculated would lead him clear of the island outside, and held on.

Moments seemed like hours as they passed. The firing continued for some time, but Walter guessed that the pursuers could not distinguish him in the darkness; and he also lost sight of them. The dull loom of the island showed up on his port side, then the wide horizon of the ocean opened out; and, heading south-east as nearly as he could guess it, he gradually drew away from the land.

Here a fresh anxiety awaited him: he saw a flashing

light well out to sea. Hitherto he had fancied this part of the coast to be fairly clear, but it was quite possible that the light marked a reef of rocks, and the question was, to which side of it ought he to steer? There was no possible way of knowing, and he must take his chance.

He looked astern for any sign of Red Jake, but could see nothing except the wake of his own launch fading away into the darkness. He throttled the engines down a trifle, then kept his eyes fixed ahead.

He moved the levers till he judged, by the feel of them, that they were half over. The speed of the launch slackened, but she was still doing a good fifteen knots. Walter edged away from the lonely beacon, and as it drew to a bearing roughly two points for'ard of the beam, he slowed down still further, and cast frequent glances over his shoulder. With the revolutions much reduced, the engines were almost silent, and the loud swish of the bow wave died away.

Presently the lighthouse passed abaft the beam, and Walter decided to open out once more and get well out to sea. But he had not proceeded far at the accelerated speed when a disturbing sound reached his ears, distinct from the working of the engines and the rush of water by the launch. It was the slop-slop of water inboard, and the only explanation of it was that the *Rattlesnake* was leaking. When he had been sheering about at high speed at the start a certain amount of spray had come aboard, but not enough to produce the wash that he could hear beneath him. To add to his difficulties, he had no binnacle compass—at any rate, he could not see one, though there was no doubt one aboard somewhere. Previously the lighthouse had given him a mark to steer by, but now he could set a course only by guess-work. The moon should have been up by now, but it was obscured by a mass of cloud on the eastern horizon, and all the stars in that region were likewise blotted out from a point half way

between the zenith and the horizon downwards. It was an awkward position to be in, with no lights, no compass, his boat leaking, and, so far as he knew, neither food nor water aboard ; while the coast behind him was the enemy's territory.

Feeling about in the darkness, his hand came in contact with a switch. He turned it cautiously, and instantly head-light and side-lights flared out, and a small bulb on the control board lit up the launch. Scared lest it should reveal its position to Red Jake, who, he felt sure, would not lightly abandon the pursuit, he switched off again ; but in that brief moment he had noticed a handle on a circular fitting, which he thought must belong to a centrifugal pump. It was out of his reach from the wheel, but he decided to let that take care of itself for a few minutes and try to clear out the water.

The pump moved stiffly at first, but easier as he got it going, and a stream of water poured over the side. Keeping an eye on the now distant lighthouse, he pumped until he found the launch running badly off her course, when he returned to the wheel and straightened her out ; then he did some more pumping.

It seemed a long time before the pump sucked dry, and Walter was in a state of perspiration ; but when he had returned to the wheel he began to shiver, and was sorry that he had left the parcel containing his jersey and cap in the motor-lorry. In his eagerness to get the cylinder and escape he had completely forgotten it. Thank goodness the cylinder itself was safely aboard!

He now began to take stock of his position from the navigation point of view. To run out to sea was a simple matter, but to decide where to go next was more difficult. His first instinct was to turn up the coast, keeping outside all lights, and so get to St. John's ; he would then hand the precious cylinder over to the police, and Hill could be arrested. But

supposing Hill could persuade the police that his story was untrue? In that event he might be detained on suspicion of stealing the cylinder, or the launch, or both, while inquiries were made, and these might take some time. He was anxious to find the *Raglan* and get back to England, and to be sure of doing this he ought to make for Halifax; but that was a long and dangerous trip. He had a vague idea that it was about a hundred and fifty or so miles to the Nova Scotia coast at Cape Sable, and he had heard that Halifax was another hundred miles up the coast, if not more. It was a long, but not an impossible distance.

"Say three hundred miles," he reflected, "which allows something for my zig-zagging about instead of taking the shortest course. Twenty hours' run at fifteen knots, or fifteen hours at twenty—yes, I can do it if she has juice enough aboard."

At last day began to break, and the outlines of the various objects and fittings aboard became clear. Just for'ard of the wheel was a small, close-fitting hatch, which, in the darkness, he had not noticed. He raised it, and exposed a small compass, neatly fitted and protracted. Here at least was one of his greatest needs supplied; but the daylight also revealed more water in the launch, and a further spell at the pump was imperative. He wondered how the water got in, and glanced over the side, but though the rubbing strake was badly scratched, there was no sign of serious damage from the collision with the *Flyaway's* boat. As soon as he had once more got it pumped clear the mystery was revealed: a bullet had gone through the thin skin of the launch, and a stream of about the diameter of a lead pencil poured in whenever the hole was immersed. A scrap of wood which he found in a locker was soon shaped and pushed firmly into the hole, and a second source of worry was thus removed.

The next thing to be settled was the course to steer. To his left, up the Bay of Fundy, he would certainly strike land sooner or later—perhaps sooner and more suddenly than he wanted to, and with disastrous consequences. Once the idea of making for Portland occurred to him, but the remembrance of the conversation he had overheard in the stockade, when Red Jake was spoken of as having influence there, made him fearful of doing so. No; he must lay a course for Halifax, or at least for Nova Scotia. His road map of Maine contained an advertisement key-map to other publications of the same sort, from which he gathered that a course about E.S.E. would enable him to sight land, if not to make a definite landfall. The *Rattlesnake* he knew could do about twenty knots, if not more, and six or seven hours should see him across. He therefore set his course E.S.E.$\frac{1}{2}$E., to allow for any outdraught of the tide, and hoped for the best.

He did not keep on that course long, however, for it presently dawned upon him that the road map would show true North, not magnetic; so he once more altered it, this time to half a point south of E.S.E. On his port bow the sun had now risen above the horizon, and, making a rough and ready calculation, he decided to reckon the time as 5.30 a.m.

Having straightened out these matters as far as his limited knowledge allowed, he settled down to drive the *Rattlesnake* all out; and the exhilaration of speeding across the open sea enabled him to forget for the time being that he had still not solved the food problem.

An hour passed, and he found himself in an utterly deserted tract of sea, for he had crossed the line of shipping making up and down the American coast for Bay of Fundy ports. Later, some fishing schooners appeared on the horizon over his starboard bow. The thought of fish reminded him of breakfast, and that, in turn, that he was hungry. Doubtless any decent

fisherman would have given him something to eat; but imagining that the skippers of these craft might be bootleggers, or if not, then men on friendly terms with Red Jake, he decided that it would be risky to approach them. He discovered a small breaker on board containing water, of which he drank but little, for it tasted strongly of the cask, and he was afraid it might be dangerously stale.

Searching his pockets as he sat at the wheel, he found a few fragments of broken biscuits remaining from what he had bought at the store near the St. Croix River. They were better than nothing, if not exactly satisfying; and as he slowly chewed them he reflected with some amusement upon how old Cape Horn Jack would, in similar case, have discarded them in favour of a plug of black tobacco, and, with a mouthful of the pungent leaf, have settled down to a twelve-hour spell at the wheel without turning a hair.

The twin engines ran with clock-like precision. Whatever may have been the shortcomings of Red Jake's shore motor, this seagoing outfit was obviously kept in perfect condition. Though Walter did not know it, the engines had, the previous morning, been thoroughly overhauled, the sparking plugs cleaned, and everything properly tuned up. It was the knowledge of this, and of the hopelessness of trying to overtake her, that had led Red Jake to give up the chase so early, and to send word to various friends on the Maine and New Hampshire coasts to be on the lookout for the *Rattlesnake*.

At last the sun appeared to be shining something west of south by compass, though its high altitude made it difficult to judge its position accurately. No land was yet visible. Several steamers had passed near at hand, and one was in sight a mile or so ahead. Walter made for her, determined to risk asking a course if she proved to be British or Canadian, as well as for a loaf of bread.

It took five minutes to overtake her, and he noted with satisfaction her name and port of registry—*Aire* of Hull. Adjusting his controls, he drew up alongside, and kept going at the speed of the steamer. An officer on the bridge hailed him.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Please give me my course for Cape Sable; and can you spare a loaf?"

The man laughed and sent for the captain. The latter, an elderly, grey-bearded man, in an old tweed suit and carpet slippers, came out of the bridge-house, and treated Walter to a prolonged stare, at the end of which he asked, "Who are you, and where are you bound?"

"I'm a seaman from the English steamer *Raglan*, making for Halifax to join my ship."

"You are, are you; and where did you get that launch from?"

"It belongs to the *Raglan*," replied Walter, for want of a better explanation. "My captain exchanged his for this, and I'm taking it to Halifax to join him."

The old skipper laughed. "You'll do—a seaman's never hard up for a lie." Then he scratched his head. "Do you happen to be the lad the *Raglan* lost before coming to St. John's? Now, no lies. I've just come out of that port, and I've heard about it."

"Yes, sir, I am."

"What was the name of the ship she towed in?"

"The *Gretchen* of Amsterdam, sir. I was aboard when we picked her up."

"Well, have you been into St. John's yourself?"

"Yes, sir; but only for a day."

"What did you do there to find your ship?"

"I telephoned the dock office, and was told she had sailed for Halifax."

"All right, my lad; you'll do. I was in the office at the time and heard you. But that's not the *Raglan's* launch: it's a Yankee contraption."

A broad grin on the skipper's face reassured Walter.

"Yes, sir," he replied; "I captured her from the bootleggers who stole ours. I've just run across from the Maine coast."

"Well, you're to south'ard of your course for the Cape Sable light. Steer east by north for ten miles and you'll sight it. Then, when you pick up the land, keep a course about north-east along the coast. Don't get scared if you keep losing it—there are some big bays to cross. You'll know it's somewhere on your port hand."

Walter expressed his thanks, with becoming respect; then stood by to catch a line on which a bag of food was let down.

"That'll keep you going till you reach Halifax," laughed the captain; and from the weight of it Walter judged that there was enough to last him at least a week.

Letting the *Rattlesnake* drop astern of the *Aire*, Walter brought her on to her new course, and opened her out again to full speed; then, steering with one hand, he helped himself to food with the other.

Presently Sable Island came in sight, and, beyond it, a nasty broken race—some shallow patch which he would possibly have been able to avoid had he had a chart aboard. Throughout the afternoon he ran on, crossing the mouths of numerous deep inlets where he lost his view of the coast altogether, but afterwards regained it. At last he came to a point beyond which the coast seemed to recede entirely. His map had led him to expect this; and he was thankful that the sun was still shining since he proposed to turn more to the eastward, and run, as nearly as he could calculate, for an hour and a half in the hope of crossing the wide mouths of Mahone and Margaret's Bays. Keeping steadily on, with more confidence now that most of his difficulties had been overcome, he let his mind dwell on the action he should take on arrival at Halifax.

During the brief time he had spent in the harbour on the outward trip, he had seen enough to realise that it was an important naval base, and he had no doubt that he could get help there if he needed it; but that might not be necessary, for the Halifax police authorities would probably give some credence to his story, especially as he could produce the cylinder in support of it. At the worst, if he had to wait for the arrival of the *Raglan*, it would not matter much now.

The sun was due west when he again picked up the coast at Pennant's Point, and followed it to the entrance to Halifax Harbour. Twenty miles more, and he would be inside it, looking for a place in which to moor.

The island, which partly blocks the entrance and affords shelter to the harbour, was abeam when his starboard engine began missing; then it went ahead again, to Walter's great relief, for though the journey was all but over, he did not want to get into difficulties entering port. Ahead he saw several vessels making and leaving the harbour, and as he proceeded towards them, one struck him as being exceptionally familiar. It must be either the *Raglan* or her twin sister. Two minutes later he was sure about it, and long before his voice could carry the distance, he began to hail her.

* * * * *

It was the second dog-watch, and the hands were standing about, ready for duty when the time came for mooring or anchoring. As was not unusual, Cape Horn Jack was holding forth.

"I tell you straight, Dick, my lad, if bo'sun's yarn's right, an' we stay here a matter o' ten days, I'm putting it straight to Cap'n Bream as I wants shore leave to take a trip to Portland to make a few inquiries on my own."

"And I'm with you," said Blewitt. "There's a packet runs across from this harbour to Portland—takes

a matter of a day or just over. But mind you, Jack, it means being away a week, and it will cost dollars."

But that aspect of the matter did not worry old Jack. It was enough for him that he had taken a fancy to Coppernob, and was going to look for him.

Proceeding to discuss ways and means, with a fine indifference to practical details, they were startled to hear an excited hail from the poop, where the second mate was superintending preparations for mooring.

"What's that?" they heard Captain Bream exclaim; "a motor-boat coming up astern?"

All ears were cocked to hear the reply, and the second mate's hoarse bellow rang out:

"Red-headed chap in a motor-boat hailing us. Fancy it's Coppernob Walters."

Walter finished his trip just as his petrol gave out. The crew of the *Raglan* rushed to the rail to see him come alongside. A line was flung, which he caught and made fast, then a rope ladder was lowered to him. Having shut off the *Rattlesnake's* engines, he clambered up to the bridge deck and saluted Captain Bream.

"Come aboard for duty, sir," he said.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

THE END OF THE TRAIL

LATE that evening, when the *Raglan* lay at a wharf off Lower Water Street, Walter told his story to Captain Bream in the chart-house.

"We'll notify the police to-night," declared the captain. "They may be able to trap that rascal Hill, or Hutch, or whatever his name is, and a wire to your father will do good all round, eh?"

Though he was tired and sleepy, Walter had to go

over the whole of his adventure again for the benefit of the fo'c'sle.

"There you are," shouted Cape Horn Jack when he had finished, "that's what brains an' hedication can do if a chap knows how to use the sea. Coppernob, my lad, when you carries a full master's ticket I'm coming to ship with you; an' mind you, my discharges has to be signed, 'Age, sixty-five.'"

Walter went ashore with Captain Bream next morning, and, at the police office, the contents of the cylinder, which Walter had been afraid to open, were examined. They proved to be two oil paintings, carefully rolled, and in good condition.

That night a wire from the frontier town of St. Croix, on the river of that name, reported that a man answering to the description of Hutch had been taken from the C.P.R. train, his passport being found to be forged; and the police authorities in Halifax undertook to despatch the cylinder to Scotland Yard.

Walter was offered his discharge, and the money for his passage home, but he chose to return to duty as seaman on the *Raglan*, her charter being a cargo for Avonmouth Docks.

While he was still with the captain, Derry, in the fo'c'sle, was airing a supposed grievance. "It's no more nor I expected," he exclaimed, disgustedly. "I always said there was something fishy about Coppernob. Chaps like him ain't no business to come to sea for fun, and do other blokes out of a job. He's no better seaman nor me; an' now he'll be swanking home in a liner, in a first-class cabin, with stewards to run after him!"

"You're a dissatisfied sort o' swab, you are," replied old Jack; "always got a grouch agin somebody. I tell you Coppernob's got the sea in him—born in him. That's what you'll never have if you live to be as old as Methusalem;" and he dealt Derry

a hearty slap on the back that jerked him several paces forward. "Coppernob's a born seaman, an' I says it."

"You say some funny things sometimes, Jack," came a voice from behind, and they turned to see Walter standing in the doorway. "What's up? Is it Derry's turn for Peggy?"

"Come to say so-long, have you?" asked History Dick, holding out his hand.

"No; it's our watch below, isn't it! I'm going to turn in."

* * * * *

Sir Henry Bempton asked to be allowed to accompany Mr. Buckland when he went to meet Walter at Bristol. They stood together on the dock side while the *Raglan* was berthed, and as soon as the gangway was put across they went aboard. Mr. Buckland found a different Walter awaiting him from the schoolboy with whom he had parted after the Easter holidays. He was taller, broader, more weather-beaten, and carried himself with the easy assurance that is bred at sea.

"Well," said Mr. Buckland when the first greetings had been exchanged, "I haven't been able to let you know before, of course, but you're cleared at Malmeswick, and the Ellis Scholarship is yours as soon as you like to claim it."

"Seems a long time ago—I'd almost forgotten all about it," replied Walter. "What about the Head's strawberry beds?"

"That was Bassett—the fellow who came second in the examination. He owned up afterwards. It appeared that he had been subjected to pressure from home; his father had insisted that he must win the scholarship at all costs—for no particular reason, as far as I can understand, except to gratify his own vanity, since he has plenty of money. When Bassett learnt that you had beaten him he was afraid to face

the music ; and, knowing your propensity for practical joking and—er—that sort of thing, he did the deed and contrived to fix the blame on you. After you disappeared the thing preyed on his mind, and brought on a mild attack of brain fever."

" So that's all right," said Walter ; and his eyes wandered affectionately over the well-known outlines of the *Raglan.* " Seems a putrid sort of thing to do. Still, I reckon Bassett's welcome to keep it so far as I'm concerned."

" Don't talk nonsense, boy," said Mr. Buckland. " Bassett's out of the question. You won the scholarship, and it's yours."

" But I don't think I particularly want it."

" Don't you be a hot-headed young ass ! " broke in Sir Henry Bempton impatiently. " Think of your future career."

" That's just what I am thinking of, sir. You see, I've had a taste of the sea, and—well, I think, if it's all the same to you, pater, I'll stick to it."

And it was even so. Sir Henry's influence easily secured for him an apprenticeship with a first-rate shipping company ; and a few weeks later he set out for London to join his new ship at the West India Docks.

As he was passing down the train at Fenchurch Street he was hailed by a voice that might have been heard above a gale, and, looking back, he saw Cape Horn Jack leaning from a carriage window.

" Where are you bound for, Coppernob, my lad ? "

" To join the *Melita,* outward bound for Australia with general cargo."

" What is she ? "

" A four-masted steel barque. I'm going into sail for a year to learn a bit."

" Good for you, my lad. I told them deck-walloppers on the *Raglan,* I did—I told 'em, says I, ' Coppernob's a sailorman ' ; an' so you are."